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The
Italian Novelists

Volume Two

THE
ITALIAN
NOVELISTS

NOW FIRST TRANSLATED INTO
ENGLISH BY

W. G. WATERS

CHOICELY ILLUSTRATED BY
E. R. HUGHES, A.R.W.S., LONDON

IN SEVEN VOLUMES
VOLUME II.

LONDON: PRIVATELY PRINTED
FOR MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY
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THE
Facetious Nights
OF
STRAPAROLA

NOW FIRST TRANSLATED INTO
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**The Incantation Of Cechato
Rabboso By Thia**

—
Night the Fifth

FOURTH FABLE

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The Incarnation Of Christ
Rabboni By T. H. M.

Fourth Edition

FOURTH EDITION

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THE FACETIOUS NIGHTS
OF GIOVANNI FRANCESCO
STRAPAROLA * * * * *

CONSISTS OF AN EXQUISITE AND DELIGHTFUL COLLECTION OF HUMOROUS WITTY AND MIRTHFUL CONVERSATIONS FABLES AND ENIGMAS INCLUDING SINGING MUSIC AND DANCING

DURING THE THIRTEEN NIGHTS
OF THE CARNIVAL AT VENICE

AS RELATED BY TEN CHARMING AND ACCOMPLISHED DAMSELS AND SEVERAL NOBLES MEN OF LEARNING ILLUSTRIOUS AND HONORABLE GENTLEMEN OF NOTE AT THE ENTERTAINMENTS OF MERRIMENT AND PLEASURE

GIVEN BY THE PRINCESS LUCRETIA
AT HER BEAUTIFUL PALACE AT
MURANO

Night the Fourth.



Night the Fourth.



ALREADY the golden-haired Apollo in his radiant chariot had sped away from this hemisphere of ours, and, having sunk beyond the distant line of sea, had betaken himself to the antipodes, and all those who had been labouring in the fields, now weary with their hard toil, felt no desire for aught save to repose quietly in their beds, when the worshipful and highborn company assembled themselves joyfully once more in the accustomed spot. And after the ladies and gentlemen had spent a short time in mirthful converse, the Signora Lucretia, when silence had been restored, bade them bring forth the golden vase. Then having written with her own hand the names of five of the ladies and cast them

into the vase, she called to the Signor Vangelista and directed him to draw out of the vase the names one by one, in order that they might clearly know to which of their companions the duty of story-telling on that same night would be assigned. Then Signor Vangelista, rising from his seat, and breaking off the pleasant discourse he was holding with Lodovica, went obediently towards the Signora, and, having sunk down upon his knees reverently at her feet, he put his hand in the vase, and drew out first the name Fiordiana, then that of Vicenza, then that of Lodovica, next that of Isabella, and last the name of Lionora. But before they made a beginning of their story-telling the Signora gave the word to Molino and to the Trevisan that they should take their lutes and sing a ballad. The two gentlemen did not wait for any further command, but forthwith tuned their instruments and sang to a joyous strain the following verse :

SONG.

There is a face which is my sun of love,
In whose kind warmth I breathe and move,
Or faint beneath its scorching ray ;
And when it shines amongst the fairest fair,
My lady reigns beyond compare,
And all around her bend beneath her sway.

Happy, thrice happy, is that favoured one,
Who sees no face but hers alone,
And passion's nectar eager sips,
Who listens to the music of her tongue,
More sweet than lay by seraphs sung,
In words that fall like jewels from her lips.

But happier still were I if she benign
Would place her lily hand in mine,
And mark me worthy such a prize to claim.
Dull clod of earth although I be,
Then should I full fruition see
Of every hope and end of every aim.

The song was attentively listened to and warmly commended by every one of the company. And when the Signora saw that it had come to an end she directed Fiordiana, to whom had been as-

signed the first turn of story-telling on this the fourth night, that she should begin hers straightway, and follow the order which had been observed since the beginning of their entertainment; and the damsel, who was no less eager to speak than the rest of the company were to listen, thus began her fable.

THE FIRST FABLE.

Ricardo, King of Thebes, had four daughters, one of whom, having become a wanderer and altered her name of Costanza to Costanzo, arrived at the court of Cacco, King of Bettinia, who took her to wife on account of the many worthy deeds wrought by her.



I MUST tell you, fair and gracious ladies, that the fable which Eritrea told to us on the evening last past has brought me into so bashful a mood that I feel but little in the humour to act the story-teller to-night. Nevertheless, the sense of obedience I have for every command of the Signora, and the respect I feel for

the whole of this honourable and gracious company, compels and encourages me to make trial with a certain story which, though it assuredly will not be found as pleasing as the one recently related by Eritrea, I will give you for what it is worth. You shall hear how a certain damsel, endowed with a noble soul and high courage, one who in the course of her noteworthy adventures was far better served by fortune than by reason, held it preferable to become a servant than to fall into a base manner of life; how, after enduring servitude for some time, she became the wife of King Cacco, and lived content with her reward. All this will be set forth to you in the story I am about to tell you.

In Egypt is situated the great and splendid city of Thebes, a place richly ornamented with noble buildings, public as well as private, situated in a country rich in cornfields growing white for the sickle, and favoured with fresh water in abundance; abounding, moreover, in all

those things which go to make up a glorious city. In times long past this city was under the rule of a king called by name Ricardo, a man profoundly wise, of great knowledge, and of the highest valour. Now this monarch, desiring greatly to have an heir to his kingdom, took to wife Valeriana, the daughter of Marliano, King of Scotland, a lady who was, in truth, perfection itself, very fair to look upon, and exceedingly gracious. Of her he begot three daughters, who were gentle in their manners, full of grace, and fair as rosebuds in the morning. Of these one was called Valentia, another Dorothea, and the third Spinella. In the course of time it became manifest to Ricardo that Valeriana his wife had come to that season of life when women commonly cease from child-bearing, and that his three daughters were all of them ripe for marriage, wherefore he determined forthwith to dispose of the three princesses in honourable wedlock, and at the same time to divide his kingdom into

three parts, whereof he proposed to give one to each of his daughters, only keeping for himself so much as he judged would suffice for the entertainment of himself, and of his family, and of his court. And all these plans he carried out as he had deliberated with himself, so that the result of his project proved to be exactly what he had wished it to be.

In due time the three maidens were given in marriage to three powerful kings, one to the King of Scardona, another to the King of the Goths, and the third to the King of Scythia ; and to each one of them was assigned, by way of dowry, a third part of their father's kingdom, Ricardo himself keeping back only a very small portion thereof to serve to satisfy his vital needs. And thus the good king, with Valeriana, his well-beloved wife, lived righteously in peace and comfort. But it happened, after a few years had passed, that the queen, of whom the king expected no further off-

spring, proved to be with child, and at the end of her time was brought to bed with a very beautiful little girl, whom the king welcomed with affection and caresses as warm as he had given to the other three children. But the queen was not so well pleased with this last infant, not, however, on account of any dislike for the child herself, but because, seeing that the kingdom was now divided into three parts and given away, she feared that there would be no chance of furnishing this daughter with a dowry sufficient to win her a marriage worthy of their state. She desired at the same time that the child should receive the share due to a daughter of hers. But, having handed over the child to the care of a very competent nurse, she gave strict command to her to use the greatest care in her charge, to give the child good instruction, and to train her in the gentle and praiseworthy manners and carriage which become a fair and graceful maiden. The child, to whom the name of Co-

stanza was given, grew day by day more lovely and her manners more engaging, nor could any subject from the most learned masters be brought forward which she would not at once apprehend most readily. By the time Costanza was twelve years of age she had already learned to embroider, to sing, to dance, to play the lute, and to do every one of those feats which are rightly held to mark a princess of rank. But, not content with these graces, she gave herself also to the study of polite letters, which proved to be to her so great a source of pleasure and delight that she would spend over them not merely the day, but the night as well, striving always to find out the exquisite beauties of the books she studied. And over and above all these excellencies she mastered completely the art of war in learning how to gentle horses, and to handle arms, and to run in the lists as if she had been a strong and well-trained man-at-arms and not a damsel. In jousting, indeed, she

was so skilled that she oftentimes came out of the contest victorious, just as if she had been one of those valorous knights who are held worthy of the highest honour. Wherefore, on account of all these virtues, and on her own account as well, Costanza was greatly loved by the king and the queen and by all those around them, so that there seemed to be no limit to their affection.

When Costanza had come to a marriageable age, the king her father, finding that he had now neither the state nor the gold required to secure for her a match with some potent sovereign equal to her merits, was greatly troubled thereanent, and often took counsel with the queen concerning the matter ; but the prudent Valeriana, in whose sight the good qualities of their child appeared to be so many and so great that no other lady in the land could in any way be put on a level with her, was not disquieted at all, and consoled the king with gentle and loving words, bidding him keep a light

heart, and not to doubt at all but that in the end some powerful sovereign, fired with love by the many virtues of their daughter, would not disdain to take her to wife, even though they might not be able to give her a dowry.

Before many months had passed the damsel was sought in marriage by divers gallant gentlemen, amongst whom was Brunello, the son of the Marquis of Vivien, whereupon the king and the queen called their daughter to them into their chamber, and when they were all seated, the king spake thus: ‘Costanza, my well-beloved child, the time is now come when it is meet that you should be married, and we have found for you as a husband a youth who ought to please your taste. He is no other than the son of the Marquis of Vivien, our good friend and neighbour; his name is Brunello, and he is a graceful seemly youth, the report of his valorous deeds having spread already throughout the world. And moreover he asks of us

nought besides our own goodwill and your fair sweet self, upon which I put a value exceeding that of all the pomp and treasure of the world. You must know that, though you are the daughter of a king, yet I cannot, on account of my poverty, find for you a more exalted alliance. Wherefore you must be content with this establishment and conform to our wishes.' The damsel, who was very prudent and conscious that she was sprung from high lineage, listened attentively to her father's words, and, without wasting any time over the matter, answered him as follows: 'Sacred majesty, there is no need that I should spend many words in replying to your honourable proposal, but simply that I should speak as the question between us demands. And first I desire to testify to you my gratitude, the warmest I can express, for all the affection and benevolence you exhibit towards me in seeking to provide me with a husband without any request from me. Next — speak-

ing with all submission and reverence — I do not purpose to let myself fall below the race of my ancestors, who from all time have been famous and illustrious, nor do I wish to debase the crown you wear by taking for a husband one who is our inferior. You, my beloved father, have begotten four daughters, of whom you have married three in the most honourable fashion to three mighty kings, giving with them great store of gold and wide domains, but you wish to dispose of me, who have ever been obedient to you and observant of your precepts, in an ignoble alliance. Wherefore I tell you, to end my speech, that I will never take a husband unless I can be mated, like my three sisters, to a king of a rank that is my due.’ Shortly after this, Costanza, shedding many tears the while, took leave of the king and queen, and, having mounted a gallant horse, set forth from Thebes alone, and determined to follow whatever road fortune might lay open to her feet.

While she was thus journeying at hazard she deemed it wise to change her name, so in lieu of Costanza she called herself Costanzo, and donned a man's attire. She passed over many mountain ranges, and lakes, and marshes, and saw many lands, and heard the tongues and took heed of the ways and manners of certain races who live their lives after the fashion of brutes rather than of men. At last, one day at the set of sun, she arrived at a famed and celebrated city called Costanza, the capital of all the country round, and at that time under the rule of Cacco, King of Bettinia. And, having entered therein, she forthwith began to admire the superb palaces, the straight roomy streets, the running water, the broad rivers, and the clear, soft, trickling fountains. Then, when she had come near to the piazza, she saw the spacious and lofty palace of the king, adorned with columns of the finest marble and porphyry, and, having raised her eyes somewhat, she saw the king,

who was standing upon a gallery which commanded a view of the whole piazza, and taking off her cap from her head she made him a profound reverence. The king, when he perceived the fair and graceful youth down below, had him called and brought into his presence, and as soon as Costanzo stood before him he demanded from what country he had come, and by what name he was called. The youth, with a smiling face, gave answer that he had journeyed from Thebes, driven thence by envious and deceitful fortune, and that Costanzo was his name. He declared, moreover, that he desired greatly to attach himself to the service of some gentleman of worth, pledging himself to serve any such lord with all the faith and affection that good service merited. The king, who meantime was mightily pleased with the appearance of the youth, said to him : ‘ Seeing that you bear the name of this my city, it is my pleasure that you tarry here in my court with no other duty

laid upon you than to attend to my person.' The youth, who desired no better office than this, first rendered to the king his gratitude, and then joyfully accepted service under him as lord, offering at the same time to hold himself ready to discharge any duty which might be assigned to him.

So Costanza, in the guise of a man, entered into the service of the king, and served him so well and gracefully that every one who came near him was astonished beyond measure at his talents. And it chanced that the queen, when she had well observed and considered the graceful bearing, the pleasant manners, and the discreet behaviour of Costanzo, began to cast her eyes more diligently upon him, until at last, so hotly did she grow inflamed with love of him, neither by day nor by night did she turn her thoughts upon any other. And so soft and so loving were the glances that she would continually dart towards him, that not only a youth, but even the hardest

rock, or the unyielding diamond even, might well have been softened. Wherefore the queen, being thus consumed with passion for Costanzo, yearned for nothing else than that she might some day find occasion to foregather with him alone. And before long it came to pass that chance gave her the opportunity of conversing with him, so she straightway inquired of him whether it would be agreeable to him to enter into her service, making it known to him likewise that by serving her he would gain, over and above the guerdon which she would give him, the approbation or even the reverence and respect of all the court.

Costanzo perceived clearly enough that these words which came out of the queen's mouth sprang from no goodwill of hers for his advancement, but from amorous passion. Knowing moreover, that, being a woman like herself, he could in no way satisfy the hot unbridled lust which prompted them, with unclouded face he humbly made answer to her in

these words : ‘ Signora, so strong is the obligation of service which binds me to my lord your husband, that it seems to me I should be working him a base injury were I to withdraw myself from my obedience to his will. Therefore I pray you to hold me excused, and to pardon me that I am not ready and willing at once to take service with you, and to accept, as the reason of this my refusal of your gracious offer, my resolve to serve my lord even unto death, provided that it pleases him to retain me as his man.’ And, having taken leave of the queen, he withdrew from her presence. The queen, who was well aware that men do not fell to earth a hard oak-tree with a single stroke, many and many a time after this made trial, with the deepest cunning and art, to entice the youth to take service under her, but he, as constant and as strong as a lofty tower beaten by the winds, was not to be moved. As soon as the queen became conscious of this, the ardent burning love

in her was turned to mortal bitter hatred, so that she could no longer bear the sight of him. And, having now grown anxious to work his destruction, she pondered day and night how she might best set to work to clear him out of her path, but she was in great dread of the king, for that he continued to hold the youth in high favour.

In a certain district of the province of Bettinia there was to be found a strange race of beings, in whom one-half of the body, that is to say, the upper part, was made after the fashion of a man, though they had ears like those of animals, and horns as well. But in their lower parts they had members resembling those of a rough shaggy goat, with a little tail, twisted and curling, of the sort one sees upon a pig. These creatures were called satyrs, and by their depredations they caused great loss and damage to the villages and the farms and the people living in the country thereabout. Wherefore the king desired greatly to have one of

these satyrs taken alive and delivered over into his keeping, but there was found no one about the court with heart stout enough to undertake this adventure and capture a satyr for the king. By sending him on an errand of this sort the queen hoped to work Costanzo's destruction, but the issue of the matter was not at all what she desired, for in this case, as in many others, the would-be deceiver, by the workings of divine providence and supreme justice, was cast under the feet of the one she purposed to beguile.

The treacherous queen, being well aware of the king's longing, happened to be one day in converse with him concerning divers matters, and, while they were thus debating, she said to him : ' My lord, have you never considered that Costanzo, your faithful and devoted servant, is strong and vigorous enough in body, and daring and courageous enough in soul, to go and capture for you one of these satyrs, and to bring him

back to you alive, without calling on anyone else to aid him. If the matter should fall out in this wise, as I believe it would, you might easily make trial of it, and in the course of an hour attain the wish of your heart, and Costanzo, as a brave and valiant knight, would enjoy the honour of the deed, which would be accounted to him for glory for ever.' This speech of the cunning queen pleased the king greatly, and he straightway bade them summon Costanzo into his presence. When the youth appeared the king thus addressed him: 'Costanzo, if indeed you love me, as you make show of doing, and as all people believe, you will now carry out fully the wish I have in my heart, and you yourself shall possess the glory of the fulfilling thereof. You are surely aware that what I desire more than aught else in the world is to have a satyr alive in my own keeping. Wherefore, seeing how strong and active you are, I reckon there is no other man in all my kingdom so well fitted to work

my will in this affair as you ; so, loving me as you do, you will not refuse to carry out my will.' The youth, who suspected not that this demand sprang from aught else than the king's desire, was anxious to give no cause of vexation to the king, and with a cheerful and amiable face thus made answer : ' My lord, in this and in everything else you may command me. However weak and imperfect my faculties may be, I will on no account draw back from striving to fulfil your wishes, even though in the task I should meet with my death. But, before I commit myself to this perilous adventure, I beg you, my lord, that you will cause to be taken into the wood where the satyrs abide a large vessel with a wide mouth of the same size as those which the servants use in dressing smooth the shifts and other kinds of body linen. And besides this I would have taken thither a large cask of good white wine, the best that can be had and the strongest, together with two bags full of the

finest white bread.' The king forthwith bade them get in readiness everything which Costanzo had described, and Costanzo then journeyed towards the wood in question. Having arrived there he took a copper bucket and began to fill it with white wine drawn from the cask, and this he poured into the other vessel which stood near by. Next he took some of the bread, and, having broken it in pieces, he put these into the vessel full of wine. This being done he climbed up into a thick-leaved tree which stood hard by, and waited to see what might happen next.

Costanzo had not been long up in the tree before the satyrs, who had smelt the odour of the fragrant wine, began to draw near to the vessel, and having come close to it, each one swilled therefrom a good bellyfull of wine, greedy as the hungry wolves when they fall upon a fold of young lambs. And after they had filled their stomachs and had taken enough, they lay down to sleep, and so sound and

deep was their slumber that all the noise in the world would not have roused them. Then Costanzo, seeing that the time for action had come, descended from the tree and went softly up to one of the satyrs, whose hands and feet he bound fast with a cord he had brought with him. Next, without making any noise, he laid him upon his horse and carried him off. And while Costanzo was on his way back, with the satyr tightly bound behind him, they came at the vesper hour to a village not far from the city, and the creature, who by this time had recovered from the effects of the wine, woke up and began to yawn as if he were rising from his bed. Looking around him he perceived the father of a family, who with a crowd around him was going to bury a dead child, weeping bitterly the while, and the priest, who conducted the service, was singing. When he looked upon this spectacle the satyr began to laugh mightily. Afterwards, when they had entered the city and were come to the piazza, the

Costanza And The Captured Slave

First Part

FIRST PART

Costanza And The Captured Satyr

Night the Fourth

FIRST FABLE



satyr beheld a great crowd of people who were staring open-mouthed at a poor lad who had just mounted the gallows to be hanged by the executioner, and the satyr laughed thereat even louder than he had laughed before. And afterwards, when they were come to the palace, a great joy seized upon the people standing by, and they all cried out ‘Costanzo ! Costanzo !’ And the satyr, when he heard this shouting, laughed louder than ever.

When Costanzo was conducted into the presence of the king and of the queen and her ladies, he presented to the king the satyr, who thereupon laughed again, and so loud and long was his laughter that all those that were there present were not a little astonished. After this the king, seeing with what diligence Costanzo had fulfilled his dearest wish, held him in as high affection and esteem as ever lord extended to servant, but this humour of his only added fresh griefs to the load which already lay upon the queen’s heart ; for that, having schemed

to ruin Costanzo, she had done nothing but exalt him to yet greater honour. Wherefore the wicked queen, not being able to endure the sight of such great prosperity as had come to Costanzo, devised yet another snare for him, which was this. She knew that the king was wont to go every morning to the cell where the satyr was kept in hold, and for his diversion would essay to make the creature talk, but as yet he had in no wise succeeded in his efforts. Wherefore, having sought out the king, she said to him: 'Sire, you have betaken yourself over and over again to the satyr's cell, and you have wearied yourself in your endeavours to induce him to talk with you in order that you might take diversion therefrom, but the creature still shows no sign of speaking a word. Why, therefore, should you further worry your brains over this affair, for you may take it for certain that, if Costanzo were only willing, he could easily make the satyr converse and answer questions.'

The king, when he listened to these words, straightway bade them summon Costanzo into his presence, and when he came the king thus addressed him: 'Costanzo, I am well assured that you know how great is the pleasure I get from the satyr you captured for me; nevertheless it irks me greatly to find that he is dumb, and will never make any answer to the words I say to him and the questions I put. If you would only do all that you might, I am sure that you would be able to make him speak.' 'Sire,' Costanzo replied, 'that the satyr is dumb is no fault of mine; it is not the office of a mortal, like me, to make him speak, but of a god. But if the reason of his muteness comes not from any natural or accidental defect, but from stubborn resolve to keep silence, I will do all that lies in my power to make him open his mouth in speech.' Then, having gone together to the satyr's prison, they gave him some dainty food, and some wine still better, and called out to him, 'Eat, Chiappino'

(for this was the name they had given to the satyr). But the creature only stared at them without uttering a word. Then they went on: 'Come, Chiappino, tell us whether that capon and that wine are to your taste;' but still he was silent. Costanzo, perceiving how obstinate the humour of the creature was, said, 'So you will not answer me, Chiappino. Let me tell you you are doing a very foolish thing, seeing that I can if I will let you die of hunger here in prison.' And at these words the satyr shot a side-glance at Costanzo. After a little Costanzo went on: 'Answer me, Chiappino; for if you speak to me (as I hope you will) I will liberate you from this place.' Then Chiappino, who had listened with eagerness to all that had been said, answered, as soon as he heard speak of liberation, 'What will you of me?' Costanzo then said, 'Tell me, have you eaten and drunk well?' 'Yes,' said Chiappino. 'Now I want you, of your courtesy, to tell me,' said Costanzo, 'what

thing it was that moved you to laughter in the village street when we met with the body of the child on its way to be buried?' To this Chiappino answered, 'I laughed, indeed, not at the dead child, but at the so-called father, to whom the child in the coffin was in fact no kin at all, and I laughed at the priest singing the office, who was the real father,' by which speech the satyr would have them understand that the mother of the child had carried on an intrigue with the priest. Then said Costanzo, 'And now I want to know, my Chiappino, what it was that made you laugh yet louder when we were come into the piazza?' 'I laughed then,' replied Chiappino, 'to see a thousand or more thieves, who had robbed the public purse of crowns by the million, who deserved a thousand gibbets, standing in the piazza to feast their eyes on the sight of a poor wretch led to the gallows, who, perchance, had merely pilfered ten florins wherewith to buy bread for himself and his poor children. That

was why I laughed.' Then said Costanzo, 'And besides this, I beg you to tell me how it was that, when we were come into the palace, you laughed longer and louder than ever?' 'Ah, I beg you will not trouble me more at present,' said Chiappino, 'but go your way and come back to-morrow, and then I will answer you and tell you certain things of which perchance you have no inkling.' When Costanzo heard this, he said to the king, 'Let us depart and come back to-morrow, and hear what this thing may be.' Whereupon the king and Costanzo took their leave, and gave orders that Chiappino should be given to eat and drink of the best, and that he should be allowed to chatter as he would.

When the next day had come they both went to see Chiappino, and they found him puffing and blowing like a great pig, and, having gone close to him, cried out to him several times in a loud voice. But Chiappino, who had well filled his belly, answered nought. Then

Costanzo gave him a sharp prick with a dart which he had with him, whereupon the satyr awoke and stood up and demanded who was there. ‘Now get up, Chiappino,’ said Costanzo, ‘and tell us that thing which yesterday you promised we should hear, and say why you laughed so loud when we came to the palace?’ To which question Chiappino made this reply: ‘For a reason which you ought to understand better than I. It was, forsooth, at hearing them all shouting, “Costanzo! Costanzo!” while all the time you are Costanza.’ The king when he heard this could in no wise comprehend what this saying of Chiappino’s might mean; but Costanzo, who immediately recognized its import, in order to keep him from speaking more, at once stopped the way for him¹ by saying: ‘And when you had been brought into the very presence of the king and queen, what made you laugh then as if nothing could stop you?’ To this Chiappino

¹ Orig., *gli troncò la strada*.

made answer: 'I laughed then so outrageously because the king, and you as well, believed that the maidens who were in service on the queen were really maidens, whereas the greater part of them were young men.' And then he was silent.

When the king heard these words he knew not what to think, but he said nothing; and, having left the wild satyr, he went out with Costanzo, wishing to learn clearly what might be the meaning of what he had heard. And after he had made due inquiry he found that Costanzo was in truth a woman, and not a youth, and that the supposed damsels about the queen were sprightly young men, as Chiappino had said. And straightway the king bade them light a great fire in the middle of the piazza, and into it, in the presence of all the people, he caused to be cast the queen and all her paramours. And, bearing in mind the praiseworthy loyalty and the open faithfulness of Costanza, and mark-

ing moreover her exceeding beauty, the king made her his wife in the presence of all his barons and knights. When he knew who her parents were, he greatly rejoiced, and forthwith despatched ambassadors to King Ricardo and to Valeriana his wife, and to the three sisters of Costanza, to tell them how she was now the wife of a king; whereupon they all felt the joy due to such good news. Thus the noble Costanza, in recompense for the faithful service she rendered, became a queen and lived long with Cacco her husband.

When Fiordiana had brought her fable to an end, the Signora made a sign to her to give her enigma. The damsel, who was somewhat haughty, rather by chance than by nature, set it forth in the following words :

Over savage lions twain
A spirit soft and mild doth reign.
By her side four damsels move,
Prudence, Valour, Faith, and Love.
She bears a sword in her right hand;
Before it calm the righteous stand,

But wicked men and souls unjust
It smites and lays them in the dust.
Discord nor wrong with her may rest,
And he who loves her wins the best.

This clever enigma set forth by Fiordiana, who indeed was a damsel of subtle mind, won the praise of all, and some found its meaning to be one thing, and some another. But there was no one of all the company who rightly divined it, seeing that all their solutions were far wide of the true one. When Fiordiana saw this she said in a lively tone, "Ladies and gentlemen, I see you are troubling yourselves in vain, seeing that my enigma means nothing else than that infinite and equal justice which like a gentle spirit rules and restrains both the hungry, savage lions, and likewise the proud, unconquerable spirit of man. More than that, justice makes steadfast her faith, holding in her right hand a sharp sword, and accompanied always by four virgins, Prudence, Charity, Fortitude, and Faith. She is gentle and kind to

the good, and severe and bitter to the perverse and bad." When Fiordiana ceased speaking, the listeners were greatly pleased with the interpretation of her enigma. Then the Signora bade the gracious Vicenza to follow in her turn with a fable, and she, eager to obey this command, spake as follows.

THE SECOND FABLE.

Erminione Glaucio, an Athenian, takes to wife Filenia Centurione, and, having become jealous of her, accuses her before the tribunal, but by the help of Hippolito, her lover, she is acquitted and Erminione punished.



F a truth, gracious ladies, there would be in all the world no condition more sweet, more delightful, or more happy than the service of love, were it not for that bitter fruit which springs from sudden jealousy, the foe which drives away gentle Cupid, the betrayer of kindly ladies, the foe who day and night tries to compass their death. Wherefore there

comes into my recollection a fable which ought to be received by you with some satisfaction, seeing that from it you will be able readily to understand the hard and piteous fate which befell a gentleman of Athens, who, because of his impotent jealousy, sought the taking off of his wife by the sword of justice, but was instead condemned himself, and met his death thereby. Which judgment ought to please you, because, if I am not greatly in error, you are yourselves all of you more or less in love.

In Athens, the most ancient city of Greece, and one which was in times past the veritable home and resort of all learning, though now, through her flighty vanity, entirely ruined and overthrown, there resided once upon a time a gentleman named Messer Erminione Glaucio, a man of much consideration and repute in the city, rich in purse, but at the same time of mean intelligence. Now it chanced that when he was an old man, finding himself without progeny, he made

up his mind to marry, and he took to wife a damsel named Filenia, daughter of Messer Cesarino Centurione, of noble descent and gifted with marvellous beauty and with good qualities out of number. In short, there was in all the city no other maiden who was her equal. And, forasmuch as he was greatly in fear lest his wife, on account of her marvellous beauty, should be courted by divers of the gallants of the city, and perhaps give occasion for some disgraceful scandal, through which the finger of scorn might be pointed at him, he resolved to restrain her in a certain lofty tower of his palace, out of sight of all passers-by. And before long it happened that the wretched old dotard, without knowing why, let his jealousy rise to such a pitch that he mistrusted even himself.

There was residing in the city at this time a certain scholar of Crete, young in years, but very discreet, and greatly loved and esteemed by all who knew him on account of his amiability and grace.

The name of this youth was Hippolito, and before Filenia was married he had paid suit to her, and, besides this, he was on intimate terms with Messer Ermini-one, who held him as dear as if he had been his own son. At a certain time during his scholar's course he found himself somewhat disinclined for study ; so, desiring to recruit his spirits, he took his departure from Athens, and having gone into Crete, he sojourned there for a time, to discover on his return that Filenia was married. On this account he fell into an access of melancholy, and he grieved the more because he was now deprived of all hope of seeing her at his pleasure, nor could he endure to remember that a maiden so lovely and graceful should be bound in marriage to a toothless, slobbering old man.

Wherefore the love-stricken Hippolito, finding himself no longer able to endure the burning pricks and the sharp arrows of love, set himself to find out some method, some hidden way by which

he might enjoy the fulfilment of his desires. And after he had well considered the many schemes which presented themselves to him, he fixed at last upon a certain one which appeared to him the most fitting. To put this in execution he first betook himself to the shop of a carpenter, his neighbour, where he ordered to be made two chests of the same length and breadth and width, and of the same measure and quality, so that no one would be able to distinguish the one from the other. This done, he repaired to Messer Erminione's house, and, making pretense of wanting something of him, spake in cunning wise the following words: 'Messer Erminione, you know well enough that I love and reverence you as if you were my own father, and for my part if I were not well convinced of your affection for myself, I would never dare, with such assurance as I now use, to beg any favour of you; but, seeing that I have ever found you well disposed to me, I am wellnigh certain that I shall

now get from you that service which my heart so greatly desires. It happens that I am constrained to leave Athens and to go to the city of Frenna to expedite some very important matters of business, and I must remain there until such time as these shall be completed. And because I have no one about me whom I can fully trust, seeing that I am served only by menials and hirelings, of whom I am in no way well assured, I would fain that you hold in charge for me — provided that it be your pleasure so to do — a certain chest of mine full of articles of value which I happen to possess.' Messer Erminione, suspecting nought of the craft of the young scholar, made answer to him that he was well content to grant this favour, and that for greater security the chest should be deposited and kept in the same chamber in which he slept. On hearing this reply the scholar returned to Messer Erminione his thanks, the warmest he knew how to render, promising the while

to keep in mind the memory of this great favour done to him as long as he should live. Then he begged the old man to do him the honour to go with him as far as his own dwelling, in order that he might exhibit to him the various articles which he had stored in the chest. Wherefore the two, having gone together to the house of Hippolito, the latter pointed out a chest filled with rich garments and jewels and necklaces of no small value, and then, having summoned a certain one of his servants and presented him to Messer Erminione, he said: 'If at any time, Messer Erminione, this my servant should be seeing after the removal of my chest, you can trust him to the full as if he were my own self.' And when Messer Erminione had taken his departure Hippolito hid himself in the other chest, which was exactly like the one filled with garments and jewels, and having fastened it from the inside, he bade his servant carry it to a certain place he knew of. The servant,

who was privy to the affair, obedient to his master's order called a porter, and having lifted the burden on the man's back, ordered him to bear it to the tower in which was situated the chamber where Messer Erminione slept every night with his young wife.

Messer Erminione, being one of the chiefs of the city and a man of wealth and influence, it fell to his lot, on account of the worshipful state he filled, to go for a certain space of time to a place called Porto Pireo, distant about twenty stadi from the city of Athens, and there to compose certain suits and strifes which had arisen between the townsmen and the peasants round about — albeit he found this errand but little to his taste. Wherefore, when Messer Erminione had gone his way, tormented as ever by the jealousy which day and night weighed upon him, the youth, shut up in the chest which now stood in Madonna Filenia's bedroom, was waiting for the favourable moment. More than once had

he heard the fair dame weeping and sighing as she bemoaned her hard lot, and the place and the hour which had seen her given in marriage to a miserable old man who had proved to be the ruin of her life. And when it seemed to him that she was in her first sleep, he got out of the chest, and, having gone to the bedside, said in a soft voice: 'Awake, my soul! for I, your Hippolito, am here.' And when she was fully aroused, and saw him and knew who he was (for there was a candle burning in the chamber), she was inclined to cry out; but the young man, putting his hand upon her lips, would not allow this, and thus addressed her in a voice full of agitation: 'Be silent, heart of mine! do you not see that I am Hippolito, your faithful lover? Of a truth I cannot live apart from you.' The fair young woman was somewhat comforted by these words, and by the time she had found the opportunity for comparing the worth of her old husband with the youthful Hippo-

lito, she was by no means ill-satisfied with the turn things had taken, and lay all night with her lover, spending the time in loving conversation and railing at the impotent ways of her doltish husband. Before they parted they agreed together to meet again in like manner, and when the morning began to dawn the youth got back into his chest, and every evening would issue therefrom and spend the night with the lady.

Now, after a good many days had elapsed, Messer Erminione, giving the business good speed both on account of the discomfort he himself suffered and of the rabid jealousy which never ceased to torment him, put an end to all the disputes he had been called upon to settle, and went back to his home. The servant of Hippolito, as soon as he heard the news of Messer Erminione's return, went without losing time to his house, and, according to the agreement which had been settled, demanded of him in the name of his master Hippolito the

return of the chest, and this Messer Erminione gave up to him without a word of demur. Wherefore, having summoned a porter, the servant caused the chest to be conveyed home. Then Hippolito, having come out of his hiding-place, went forthwith to the piazza, where he met with Messer Erminione, and after he had embraced him, he thanked him most courteously in the warmest terms he could find for the great kindness he had received, and at the same time declared that he himself and all that he possessed should ever be ready at Messer Erminione's service.

It chanced that on a certain morning Messer Erminione remained in bed with his wife somewhat later than was his wont, and, lifting up his eyes, he remarked upon the wall and high above his head certain stains which looked as if they had been caused by someone spitting thereon. Wherefore his inveterate jealousy began once more to trouble him, and he was mightily amazed at

what he saw, and began to turn it over in his mind in such wise that, after he had well considered the matter, he could not bring himself to believe that the marks on the wall in question were any work of his. Then, with strong apprehension as to their meaning, he turned to his wife and with an angry troubled face demanded of her: 'What have you to say about those spit marks high up on the wall there? I am well assured they were never made by me, for I never spat up there in my life. I strongly suspect that you have betrayed my honour.' Filenia, laughing the while at this speech, thus answered him: 'Is there no other charge you would like to bring against me?' Messer Erminione, when he saw her begin to laugh, grew more infuriated than ever, and said: 'Ah, you laugh, do you, wicked woman that you are? Now, tell me quickly what it is that makes you laugh.' 'I am laughing,' answered Filenia, 'at your own foolishness.' At these words Messer Erminione began to

chafe with rage,¹ and, being anxious to make trial of his own powers and to see whether he could spit so high, with much coughing and gasping he strained with all his might to reach the mark on the wall by his spitting, but he wearied himself in vain, for the spittle always fell down again and lighted upon his visage, plastering him thickly with filth. And after the wretched old man had made this trial many times, he found that he only got in worse case every turn. So, by the light of this experience, he persuaded himself that his wife had assuredly played him false, and, turning to her, he began to assail her with the most rascally words that could be applied to a guilty woman, and, if he had not been in fear of the law and of his own neck, he would surely have slain her then and there with his own hands, but he managed to restrain himself, deeming it better to deal with her by legal process than to stain his hands in her

¹ Orig., *tra se stesso se radeva*.

blood. Not satisfied with the rating he had already given her, he betook himself, full of wrath and anger, to the tribunal, where he preferred before the judge a charge of adultery against his wife. But, seeing that it lay not within the power of the judge to pronounce condemnation upon her unless the legal statutes should have been duly observed, he ordered Filenia to be brought before him in order that he might narrowly examine her.

Now, there was in Athens a law, which was held in the highest reverence, providing that any woman who might be charged by her husband with adultery should be placed at the foot of a certain red column, round which was entwined a serpent, and there make oath whether or not the accusation of adultery brought against her were true. And after she had taken the oath she was required forthwith to put her hand in the serpent's mouth, and then, if she should have sworn falsely, the serpent would at

once bite off her hand ; otherwise, she received no injury. Hippolito, who had already heard rumours of this charge before the tribunal, and that the judge had sent to fetch Filenia to put her on her defence, being a youth of resource at once took action to see that she should not run into the snares of ignominious death. By way of rescuing her from condemnation he first of all stripped off all his clothes and donned in their stead some rags befitting a madman, and then, without being seen by anyone, he left his own lodging and ran straight to the tribunal as if he had been some one out of his mind, acting well the part of a crazy man as he went along the streets.

Now it chanced that while the officers of the court were haling along the poor lady towards the tribunal, all the people of the city gathered themselves together to take note as to how the cause would end, and in the midst of the crowd the pretended madman, forcing his way now here, now there, worked himself so well

to the front that he found opportunity to cast his arms round the neck of the woeful lady, and to press a kiss upon her lips, which caress she, seeing that her arms were bound behind her back, could in no wise escape. When the young woman had been brought into the presence of the tribunal the judge addressed her in these words: 'As you may see, Filenia, your husband Messer Ermini-one is here to lay complaint against you that you have committed adultery, and furthermore prays that I should deal out to you the due penalty according to the statute; wherefore you must now make oath and say whether or not the charge which your husband brings against you is true.' Then the young woman, who was very wary and keen of intellect, swore with confidence that no man had ever touched her save her husband and the madman who was now present before them all. Then, after she had sworn, the underlings of the court led her to the place where was the serpent, which,

Hippolito's Strategy To Save
Hilena

Right the Wrong

SEE VOLUME

Hippolito's Strategy To Save Filenia

Night the Fourth

SECOND FABLE



after Filenia's hand had been placed in its mouth, did her no harm whatever, inasmuch as what she had sworn was really the truth, namely, that no man had ever given her caress of any sort except her husband and the so-called madman.

When they perceived this, the crowd, and all her kinsfolk, who had come thither to see the solemn and terrible sight, at once set her down as innocent and wrongfully accused, and cried out that Messer Erminione deserved the same death which was the penalty of the crime imputed to his wife. But, for the reason that he was a noble, a man of high lineage, and one of the chiefs of the city, the president would not permit him to be publicly burned (for so much power the law gave him), but, in order that he might duly discharge his office, he sentenced Erminione to be thrown into prison, where, after a short space of time, he expired. This is the wretched end which Messer Erminione put to his

senseless jealousy, and by these means the young wife was delivered from an ignominious death. Before great length of time had passed Hippolito made her his lawful wife, and they lived many years happily together.

When the story told by the discreet and modest Vicenza had come to an end — a story which pleased all the ladies mightily — the Signora bade her to propound her enigma in due course, and she, raising her pretty smiling face, instead of one of her songs gave the following riddle:

When hope and love and strong desire
Are born to set the world on fire,
That self-same hour a beast is born,
All savage, meagre, and forlorn.
Sometimes, with seeming soft and kind,
Like ivy round an elm-tree twined,
It clips us close with bine and leaf,
But feeds on heartache, woe, and grief.
Ever in mourning garb it goes,
In anguish lives, in sorrow grows.
And worse than worst the fate of him
Who falls beneath its talons grim.

Here Vicenza brought her enigma to an end. The interpretations of its meaning were diverse, and no one of the company was found clever enough to fathom its true import. When Vicenza saw this, she sighed a little impatiently, and then, with a smiling face, spake as follows: "The enigma I have set you to guess means nothing else than chilling jealousy, which, all lean and faded, is born at the same birth with love itself, and winds itself round men and women as well, just as the gently-creeping ivy embraces the trunk so dear to it. This jealousy feeds on heartache, seeing that a jealous one always lives in anguish and moves about in sombre garb on account of the continual melancholy that torments him." This explication of the enigma gave great pleasure to all, and especially to Signora Chiara, whose husband had a temper somewhat jealous. But, to let no one say to himself that Vicenza's enigma had been framed to fit his case, the Signora bade them at once

put a stop to their laughter, and signed to Lodovica, whose turn it was to tell the next story, that she should forthwith begin, and the damsel opened her fable in the following words.

THE THIRD FABLE.

Ancilotto, King of Probino, takes to wife the daughter of a baker, and has by her three children. These, after much persecution at the hands of the king's mother, are made known to their father through the strange working of certain water, and of an apple, and of a bird.



I HAVE always understood, lovesome and gracious ladies, that man is the noblest and most capable of the living creatures fashioned by nature, seeing that God made him in His own image and similitude, and willed that he should rule and not be ruled. And on this account it is said that man is the perfect animal, and of greater excellence than any of the others, because all these, not even excepting woman, are subject to him.

Therefore, those who by deceit and cunning compass the death of so noble a creature commit a foul crime. And there is no wonder if sometimes those who work for the bane of others run heedlessly into destruction themselves, as did four women I have to tell of, who, in trying to destroy others, were themselves cut off and made a wretched end. All this you will readily understand from the fable I purpose to tell you.

In Provino, a very famous and royal city, there lived in ancient times three sisters, fair of person, gracious in manners, and courteous in bearing, but of base lineage, being the daughters of a certain Messer Rigo, a baker who baked bread for other folk in his oven. Of these one was named Brunora, another Lionella, and another Chiaretta. It happened one day when the three sisters were in their garden, and there taking much delight, that Ancilotto the king, who was going to enjoy the diversion of hunting with a great company, passed

that way. Brunora, the eldest sister, when she looked upon the fair and noble assemblage, said to her sisters Lionella and Chiaretta, 'If I had for my husband the king's majordomo, I flatter myself that I would quench the thirst of all the court with one glass of wine.' 'And I,' said Lionella, 'flatter myself that, if the king's private chamberlain were my husband, I would pledge myself to make enough linen from a spindle of my yarn to provide shifts of the strongest and finest make for all the court.' Then said Chiaretta, 'And I, if I had the king himself for my husband, I flatter myself that I would give him three children at one birth, two sons and a daughter. And each of these should have long hair braided below the shoulders, and intermingled with threads of the finest gold, and a golden necklace round the throat, and a star on the forehead of each.'

Now it chanced that these sayings were overheard by one of the courtiers,

who hastened to the king and told him of the young girls' discourse, and the king, when he heard the tenour thereof, at once commanded that they should be brought before him, and this done, he examined them one by one as to what they had said in the garden. Whereupon each one, with the most respectful words, told the king what she had spoken, and he was much pleased thereat. So then and there he wedded Brunora to the majordomo and Lionella to the chamberlain, while he himself took Chiaretta to wife. There was no hunting that day, for the whole company returned to the city, where the marriages were celebrated with the greatest pomp. But the mother of Ancilotto was greatly wroth at his marriage, for however fair Chiaretta might be in face and figure, and graceful in her person, and sweet and modest in her conversation, the queen-mother held it to be a slight to the royal dignity that her daughter-in-law should be of vile and common descent, nor could

she endure it that the majordomo and the chamberlain should be brothers-in-law of the king her son. These things kindled so hotly the rage of the queen-mother against Chiaretta that she could scarce endure her presence ; nevertheless she hid her wrath so as not to offend her son. In due time (by the good pleasure of Him who rules over all), Chiaretta became with child, to the great joy of the king, whose fancy at once busied itself with the prospect of the lovely progeny he had been promised.

Just at the time when Chiaretta was expecting to be brought to bed, Ancilotto was forced to make a journey to a distant country and to abide there some days, and he directed that, during his absence, his mother should see to the welfare of the queen and of the children who, he hoped, would soon be born. The queen-mother, though she hated her daughter-in-law, let not the king see this, and assured him that she would take the greatest care of them all, while he

might be away, and before the king had been gone many days (as Chiaretta when she was a virgin had pledged) three lovely children, two boys and a girl, were born. Likewise their hair was braided below their shoulders, and they bore golden chains on their necks and golden stars on their foreheads. The queen-mother, whose hatred against Chiaretta burned as malignantly as ever, no sooner cast her eyes upon the innocent children than she determined to have them put away privily, so that no one might know they had even been, and that Chiaretta might be disgraced in the sight of the king. And besides this, Brunora and Lionella had grown to regard their sister with violent hate and jealousy since she had become their sovereign, and lost no chance to aggravate, by all sorts of cunning wiles, the spite of the queen-mother against Chiaretta.

On the very same day that the queen was delivered, it chanced that there were born in the stable-yard three black mon-

grel pups, two dogs and a bitch, which, by some strange freak, had white stars on their foreheads and bore round their necks traces of a gorget. This coming to the knowledge of the two sisters, they took the pups away from the dam and brought them to the queen-mother, and with humble salutations said to her: 'We know, madam, that your highness has little love for our sister, and quite justly; for she is of humble stock, and it is not seemly that your son and our king should have mated with such an one. Hence, knowing the mind you have towards her, we have brought you here three mongrel pups, which, as you will see, were born with a star on their foreheads, and you can deal with them as you list.' At these words the queen-mother was much pleased, divining well their evil intent, and she contrived to bring to her daughter-in-law, who as yet had not seen the children she had borne, the three whelps, telling her at the same time they were her own offspring. And

for the better hiding of this trick the wicked old woman bade the midwife to tell the same story to the queen. So when she herself and the two sisters and the midwife returned to the chamber, they presented to the queen the three mongrel whelps, saying, 'See, O queen, the fruit of your womb! Cherish it well, so that the king, when he comes back, may rejoice in the fair gift you have made him.' And with these words the midwife put the mongrels by her side, consoling her and telling her that such mischances as hers happened now and then to persons of high estate.

These wicked women having carried out this barbarous work, it only remained for them to contrive a cruel death for the three lovely children of the queen. But God mercifully held them back from soiling their hands with the blood of their kin. They made a box, which they waxed within, and, having put the children therein, they closed it and cast it into the river to be borne away by the

stream. But God in His justice would not allow these innocents to suffer. As the box floated along it was espied by a certain miller named Marmiato, who haled it out and opened it, and found within three smiling children. Seeing how fair and graceful they were, he deemed them to be the children of some noble lady who, to hide her shame, had committed this crime. Having taken home the box he said to his wife, who was called Gordiana, ‘See here, wife, what I have found in the river; it is a present for you.’ Gordiana received the children joyfully, and brought them up as if they had been her own, giving to one the name of Acquirino, to another Fluvio—as they had been found in the river—and to the girl that of Serena.

Ancilotto, when he came back from his journey, was in high spirits, for he fully expected to find on his return that Chiaretta had fulfilled her pledge and given him the three fair children as she had promised; but the issue was not

what he hoped, for the cunning queen-mother, when she saw her son drawing near, went to meet him, and told him that the wife he prized so highly had given him, instead of three children, three mongrel dogs. And having brought him into the chamber of the unfortunate Chiaretta, she showed him the pups which were lying beside her. The queen began to weep bitterly and to deny that the dogs were her offspring, but her wicked sisters came and declared that everything the old mother had said was the truth. The king when he heard this was greatly disturbed, and fell to the ground grief-stricken. After he had come to himself he could scarce believe such thing could be; but at last he gave ear to his mother's false tale. But Chiaretta's dignity and sweetness, and the patience with which she bore the insults of the courtiers, won him over to spare her life, and to sentence her to be kept in a cell under the place where the cooking pots and pans were washed, and to

be fed on the garbage which was swept off the dirty sink.

While the unhappy queen passed her life in this filthy wise, feeding upon carrion, Gordiana, the wife of the miller Marmiato, gave birth to a son who was christened Borghino and brought up with the three foundlings. When Gordiana went to cut the hair of these there often fell out of it many precious stones and great white pearls; so with these riches Marmiato was able to give over the humble calling of a miller, and to live with his wife and the four children a life of ease and delicacy. But when the three foundlings had come to years of discretion they learned by chance that they were not the children of Marmiato and Gordiana, but had been found floating in a box on the river. As soon as they knew this they became very unhappy, and resolved to go their way and try their fortune elsewhere, much to the chagrin of their foster-parents, who saw they would no longer enjoy the rich har-

vest of jewels which was wont to fall from the children's locks and starry foreheads. The brothers and their sister having left Marmiato the miller and Gordiana, they all wandered about for some days, and at last came by chance to Provino, the city of Ancilotto their father, where they hired a house and lived together, maintaining themselves by selling the jewels which still fell out of their hair. One day the king, who was riding into the country with some of his courtiers, chanced to pass the house where the three were living, and they, as soon as they heard the king was coming, ran down the steps and stood bareheaded to give him a respectful salutation. They had never seen Ancilotto, so his face was unknown to them. The king, whose eyes were as keen as a hawk's, looked at them steadily, and remarked that on their foreheads there was something like a golden star, and immediately his heart was filled with strong passion, and he felt that they

might prove to be his children. He stopped and said to them: 'Who are you, and from whence do you come?' And they answered humbly, 'We are poor strangers who have come to dwell in this your city.' Then said Ancilotto, 'I am greatly pleased; and what are you called?' Whereupon they replied that one was named Acquirino, and the other Fluvio, and the sister, Serena. The king then bade them to dinner with him next day; and the young people, though they were almost overcome by his gracious invitation, did not venture to decline it. When Ancilotto returned to the palace he said to his mother: 'Madam, when I was abroad to-day I came by chance upon two handsome youths and a lovely maiden, who, as they had golden stars on their foreheads, must be I think the children promised to me by Queen Chiaretta.'

The wicked old woman smiled at the king's words, making believe they were but fancy, but within she felt as if a dag-

ger had smitten her heart. Then she bade them summon the midwife who had been present at the birth, and said to her in private, 'Good gossip, do you not know that the king's children, so far from being dead as we hoped, are alive, and are grown up as beautiful as the day?' 'How can this be?' replied the woman; 'were they not drowned in the river? Who has told you this?' The queen-mother answered: 'From what I gather from the words of the king I am almost sure they are alive. We must be up and doing at once, for we are in great danger.' 'Do not be alarmed, madam,' said the midwife, 'I have in mind a plan by which we can now assuredly compass the destruction of all the three.'

The midwife went out, and immediately found her way to the house of the king's children, and, finding Serena alone, she saluted her and talked of many things. After she had held a long discourse with her, she said, 'My daughter, I am curious to know if you have in your

house any water which can dance.' Serena, somewhat surprised at this question, answered that she had not any. 'Ah, my daughter,' said the gossip, 'what delights you would enjoy if you had some of it! and if you could bathe your face in it you would become more beautiful even than you are now.' Said the girl, with her curiosity aroused, 'And how can I get it?' 'Have you not brothers?' the gossip asked. 'Send them to fetch it; they will easily find it, for it is to be had not far from these parts.' And with these words she departed. After a little Acquirino and Fluvio came back, and at once Serena began to beseech them that they would do their best, for the love they bore her, to get for her some of the wonderful dancing water; but they laughed at her request as a silly fancy, and refused to go on a fool's errand, seeing that no one could say where it was to be found. However, persuaded at last by the petition of their sister, whom they loved very dearly, they departed together to do her

bidding, taking with them a phial to hold the precious water. When they had gone several miles they came to a fountain out of which a snow-white dove was drinking, and they were amazed when the bird spoke to them these words: 'What seek ye, young men?' To this Fluvio answered, 'We seek the precious dancing water.' 'Wretched youths,' said the dove, 'who sends you on such a quest as this?' 'We want it for our sister,' said Fluvio. 'Then you will surely meet your deaths,' said the dove, 'for the water you are in search of is guarded by many fierce beasts and poisonous dragons, who will certainly devour you; but if you must needs have some of it, leave the task to me, for I will surely bring it back to you;' and having taken the phial the dove flew away out of sight.

Acquirino and Fluvio awaited her return with the greatest anxiety, and at last she came in sight, bearing the phial filled with the magic water. They took it

from her, and, having thanked her for the great service she had rendered them, returned to their sister and gave her the water, exhorting her never to impose such another task upon them, because they had nearly met their deaths in attempting it. A short time after this the king again met the two brothers and said to them: 'Why did you not come to dine with me after accepting my invitation?' 'Gracious majesty,' they answered with profound respect, 'a pressing errand called us away from home.' Then said the king, 'To-morrow I shall expect to see you without fail.' The youths having made their apology, the king returned to the palace, where he met his mother and told her he had once more seen the youths with the stars on their foreheads. Again the queen-mother was greatly perplexed, and again she bade them summon the midwife, to whom she secretly told all she had heard, and at the same time begged her to find a way out of the danger. The gossip bade her take

courage, for she would so plan this time that they would be seen no more. The midwife went again to seek Serena, whom she found alone, and asked her whether she had got any of the dancing water. 'I have it,' the girl replied, 'but the winning of it nearly caused the death of my brothers.' 'The water is fair enough,' said the woman, 'but you ought to have likewise the singing apple. You never saw fruit so fair to look upon, or listened to music so sweet as that which it discourses.' 'But how shall I get it?' said Serena; 'for my brothers will never go in search of it, seeing that in their last venture they were more in peril of death than in hope of life.' 'But they won the dancing water for you,' said the woman, 'and they are still alive; they will get for you the singing apple just as harmlessly;' and, having spoken, she went her way.

Scarcely had the midwife gone when Acquirino and Fluvio came in, and again Serena cried out to them: 'Oh, my

brothers! I hear now of another wonder, more beautiful far than the dancing water. It is the singing apple, and if I cannot have it I shall die of vexation.' When Acquirino and Fluvio heard these words they chid her sharply, affirming that for her sake they were reluctant to brave again the risk of death. But she did not cease her prayers, and she wept and sobbed so sorely that the brothers, seeing that this new desire of hers came from her inmost soul, again gave way and agreed to satisfy it at whatever risk. They mounted and rode on till they came to an inn, and demanded of the host whether he could let them know where was to be found the apple which sang so sweetly. He told them he knew thereof, and warned them of the perils which lay in the path of anyone bold enough to seek to pluck it. 'It grows,' he said, 'in the midst of a fair garden, and is watched day and night by a poisonous beast which kills without fail all those who come nigh to the tree.' 'What then

would you counsel us to do?’ said the youths; ‘for we are set upon plucking the apple at all cost.’ ‘If you will carry out my behests,’ said the host, ‘you may pluck the apple without fear of the poisonous beast or of death. You must take this robe, which, as you see, is all covered with mirrors, and one of you must put it on, and thus attired enter the garden, the door of which will be found unfastened; but the other must bide without and be careful not to let himself be seen. And the beast forthwith will make for the one who enters, and, seeing an exact similitude of himself reflected by the mirrors, will fall down to the ground, and then the adventurer may go quickly up to the tree and pluck tenderly the singing apple and without once looking behind him quit the garden.’ The young men thanked their host courteously, and observed all his directions so faithfully that they won the apple without mischance, and carried it back to Serena, and again besought

her no more to compel them to run into such danger. Thus for a second time they failed to keep their engagement with the king, who, meeting them again a few days afterwards, said: 'For what reason have you once more disobeyed my commands and failed to come and dine with me?' Fluvio answered as before that some weighty matters of business had intervened and kept them from doing themselves the great honour the king had proposed for them. Then said the king, 'You must come to-morrow, and see that you fail not.' Acquirino promised obedience, and the king returned to his palace, where he met his mother and told her he had again seen the two youths, that he was more firmly persuaded than ever that they must be the children promised him by Chiaretta, and that he would feel no rest till they should have eaten at his table. The queen-mother when she heard that they yet lived was in sore terror, doubting not that her fraud had been discovered, and

thus, struck with grief and terror, she sent for the midwife and said to her: 'I surely thought the children were dead by this time, and that we should hear no more of them; but they are alive, and we stand in peril of death. Look therefore to our affair; otherwise we shall be lost.' 'Noble lady,' said the midwife, 'take heart. This time I will work their bane without fail, and you will bless me therefor, seeing that they will trouble you no longer;' and the woman, full of rage at her failure, again repaired to the house of Serena, where she found the girl alone. With crafty speech she inquired of Serena whether she had indeed got the singing apple, and the girl made answer that she had. Then said the cunning woman: 'Ah, my daughter, you must think that you have nothing at all if you do not get one thing more, the most beautiful, the most graceful thing in the world.' 'Good mother, what may this fair thing be?' said the girl. The old woman replied: 'It is

the beautiful green bird, my child, which talks night and day, and speaks words of marvellous wisdom. If you had it in your keeping you might indeed call yourself happy ;' and, having thus spoken, she went her way.

Acquirino and Fluvio came in almost directly after she was gone, and Serena forthwith began to beg them to do her one last favour, whereupon they asked her what might be this boon which she desired. She answered that she wanted the beautiful green bird. Fluvio, who had plucked the apple guarded by the venomous beast, was still haunted by the peril of his adventure, and refused to go in quest of the bird. Acquirino, though for a long time he too turned a deaf ear, was finally moved by the brotherly love he felt and by the hot tears of grief which Serena shed, and determined to satisfy her wish. Fluvio also agreed to accompany him, and, having mounted their horses, they rode for several days, until at last they came into a flowery

green meadow, in the midst of which stood a lofty tree surrounded with marble statues which mocked life by their marvellous workmanship. Through the meadow there ran a little stream, and up in the tall tree lived the beautiful green bird, which hopped about from bough to bough in lively fashion, uttering the while words which seemed rather divine than human. The young men dismounted from their palfreys, which they left to graze at will, and went close to the marble statues to examine them ; but, as soon as they touched these, they themselves were turned into marble as they stood.

Now Serena, when for several months she had anxiously looked for the return of her dear brothers Acquirino and Fluvio, began to despair and to fear she would never see them more, and, overcome with grief at their unhappy fate, she resolved to try her own fortune. So she mounted a mettlesome horse, and rode on and on till she came to the fair

meadow where the green bird was hopping about on the tall tree and softly talking. There the first things she saw was her brothers' horses, which were grazing on the turf, and, casting her eyes upon the statues, she saw that two of them must be Acquirino and Fluvio, for the unhappy youths, though turned into marble, retained their features exactly as in life. Serena dismounted, and going softly up to the tree she laid hands on the green bird from behind, and he, finding himself a prisoner, besought her to let him go, and promised that at the right time and place he would remember her. But Serena answered that first of all he must restore her brothers to their former state, upon which the bird replied: 'Look then under my left wing, and there you will find a feather much greener than any of the others and marked with yellow. Pluck it out and touch with it the eyes of the statues, and then your brothers will return to flesh and blood.' Serena raised the wing, and found the

feather, and did as the bird had directed, and the statues of Acquirino and Fluvio at once became living men and embraced their sister joyfully.

This wonder being accomplished, the bird again besought Serena to give him his liberty, promising that if she would grant his prayer he would come to her aid, whenever she might call upon him ; but Serena was not to be thus cajoled, and declared that before she would let him go free he must help them to find their father and mother, and that until he had accomplished this task he must be her prisoner.

There had already arisen some dispute amongst the three as to who should have the bird in keeping, but in the end they settled that it should be left in charge of Serena, who tended it with great care and watched over it. The affair having come to this happy issue, they mounted their horses and rode home. Meantime Ancilotto had often passed by their house, and finding it empty was much

astonished, and inquired of the neighbours what had become of them ; but all he could learn was that nothing had been seen of them for many days. They had not been back long before the king again rode by, and, catching sight of them, asked how it was that nothing had been seen of them for so long, and why they had disregarded his commands so often. Acquirino answered with deep respect that some amazing troubles and adventures had befallen them, and that if they had not presented themselves at the palace before his majesty as he had desired it was through no want of reverence. They were all anxious to amend their conduct in the future.

The king, when he heard they had been in tribulation, was moved to pity, and bade them all accompany him back to the palace to dinner ; but before they set forth Acquirino filled secretly a phial with the dancing water, Fluvio took the singing apple, and Serena the talking bird, and they rode back with the king

and joyously entered the palace with him and sat down at the royal table. It chanced that the queen-mother and also the two sisters of Chiaretta marked them as they passed, and observing the beauty of the maiden and the handsome bright-eyed youths, they were filled with dread and suspicion as to who they might be. When the royal banquet had come to an end, Acquirino said to the king : ‘ May it please your majesty that, before we take our leave, we should show your majesty some marvels which may delight you ; ’ and with these words he poured into a silver tazza some of the dancing water, while Fluvio put his hand into his bosom and drew therefrom the singing apple, which he placed beside the water. Serena also brought out the talking bird, and set it on the table. Immediately the apple began to sing most sweetly, and the wonderful water to dance, so that the king and all the courtiers were delighted and laughed aloud with pleasure ; but the queen-mother and the wicked sisters

were smitten with dire dismay, for they felt that their doom was near.

At last, when the apple and the water had ceased to sing and dance, the bird opened its mouth and said : ‘ O sacred majesty ! what doom should be dealt to those who once plotted death against two brothers and a sister ? ’ Then the cunning queen-mother, scheming to excuse herself, cried out : ‘ No lighter doom than death by burning ; ’ and in this condemnation all those who were present agreed. To answer her the singing apple and the dancing water said straightway : ‘ Ah, false and cruel woman ! your own tongue has doomed yourself, and those wicked and envious sisters of the queen, and the vile midwife, to this horrible death. ’

When the king heard these words his heart grew cold with terror ; but before he could speak the talking bird began and said : ‘ O sacred majesty ! these are the three children you longed for, your children who bear the star on their foreheads ; and their innocent mother, is she

not to this day kept a prisoner under the filthy scullery?’ Then the king saw clearly how he had been tricked, and gave order that the unhappy Chiaretta should be taken out of her noisome prison and robed once more in her royal garments. As soon as this had been done, she was brought into the presence of the king and of his court; and though she had for so long time suffered such cruel usage, she retained all her former loveliness. Then the talking bird related the strange history from beginning to end, and the king, when he knew it all, embraced tenderly Chiaretta and their three children; but the dancing water and the singing apple and the talking bird, having been set at liberty, disappeared straightway.

The next day the king commanded to be lighted in the centre of the market a huge fire, into which he caused to be thrown, without pity, his mother and the two sisters of Chiaretta and the midwife, so that in the presence of everybody they might be burnt to death. And Anci-

lotto lived happily many years with his beloved wife and his beautiful children, and, having chosen for Serena an honourable husband, he left his two sons the heirs of his kingdom.

Lodovica's story gave great delight to all the ladies, and the Signora, having commanded her to supplement it in due order, she propounded the following enigma :

When Sol pours down his fiercest heat,
High on Gheraldo's lofty seat,
A wight I marked, with roguish eye,
Shut fast within a closure high.
All through the day he prates and talks,
And clad in robes of emerald walks.
I've told you all except his name,
And that from your own wit I claim.

Many were the interpretations put upon this enigma, but no one came near to the mark save the charming Isabella, who, greatly pleased with herself, said in a merry tone : "There is no other possible signification of Lodovica's enigma

except to name the parroquet, which lives within a cage, the closure, and has plumage green as emerald, and talks all day long." The clever solution of the riddle pleased everybody except Lodovica, who had flattered herself that no one would be clever enough to solve it, and who now became almost dumb with vexation. A little later, when the flush of anger had faded somewhat from her cheek, she turned to Isabella, whose turn it was to tell the fourth story, and said: "I am vexed, Isabella, not from envy of you, as the teller of the next story, but because I feel myself inferior to those other companions of yours who have had to give the solution of their riddles, the company not being able to solve them; whereas mine was guessed at once. Be assured, however, that if I can give you a Roland for your Oliver, I will not be caught napping."¹ Isabella answered quickly, "You will do well, Signora Lo-

¹ Orig., *che se io potrò rendervi il contra cambio non starò a dormire.*

dovica, but —” Here the Signora, who saw that the contention was like to grow warm between the two, commanded Isabella to go on at once with her story, which, with a smile, she began to tell as follows.

THE FOURTH FABLE.

Nerino, the son of Gallese, King of Portugal, becoming enamoured of Genobbia, wife of Messer Raimondo Brunello, a physician, has his will of her and carries her with him to Portugal, while Messer Raimondo dies of grief.



TMUST tell you, charming ladies, that there are very many men who, because they have consumed a great part of their time over the study of letters, are persuaded that they are mighty wise, whereas in truth they know little or nothing. And while men of this sort think they are marking their foreheads with lines of wisdom, they too often only scoop out their own eyes,¹ which thing happened

¹ Orig., *credonsi signare il fronte à se stessi cavano gli occhi.*

to a certain physician, greatly skilled in his calling, for he, while he deemed he was about to put a cheat upon another, was himself most ignominiously duped, to his own great injury, all of which you will learn from the fable which I will presently tell you.

Gallese, King of Portugal, had a son whose name was Nerino, and in the bringing up of this boy he followed such a course that up to the time when he reached his eighteenth year Nerino had never once cast eyes upon a woman except his mother and the nurse who had the care of him. Wherefore when he had come to full age the king determined to send him to pursue his studies in the university of Padua, so that he might get a knowledge of Latin letters and of the tongue and manners of the Italians as well. And the plan which he had devised he duly carried out. When the young Nerino had come to Padua, he soon acquired the friendship of many of the scholars, and every day these would

come to pay their respects to him, one of the above named being a certain Messer Raimondo Brunello, a physician. It chanced one day, as Nerino and this friend of his were conversing now about this thing and now about that, they engaged (as is the manner of sprightly youths) in a discourse anent the beauty of women, and on this subject the former took one view and the latter another. But Nerino, though he had never in times past cast eyes upon any woman save his mother and his nurse, declared with some heat that in his reckoning there could not be found in all the world any lady who should be more beautiful, more graceful, and more exquisite, than was his own mother. And when, by way of putting this speech of his to the test, they brought divers ladies to his notice, he still declared that in comparison to his mother they were little better than carrion.

Now Messer Raimondo had to wife a lady who was one of the fairest nature ever created, and when he listened to

this chattering he settled his gorget and said : ‘ Signor Nerino, I happen to have seen a certain lady who is of such great loveliness that when you shall have beheld her I think it probable you will judge her to be not less but more beautiful than your mother.’ To this speech Nerino made answer that he could not believe there could be any woman more lovely than his mother, but at the same time it would give him great pleasure to look upon this one. Whereupon Messer Raimondo said ; ‘ Whenever it shall please you to behold her I will gladly point her out to you.’ Nerino replied : ‘ I am much pleased at what you propose, and I shall ever be obliged to you.’ Then Messer Raimondo said at once : ‘ Since it will give you pleasure to see her, take care to be present in the Church of the Duomo to-morrow morning, for there I promise you that you shall have sight of her.’

When he had returned to his house, Messer Raimondo said to his wife : ‘ To-

morrow morning see that you rise betimes, and deck carefully your head, and make yourself seem as fair as you can, and put on the most sumptuous raiment you possess, for I have a mind that you should go to the Duomo at the hour of high mass to hear the office.' Genobbia (for this was the name of Messer Raimondo's wife), not being in the habit of going now hither now thither, but rather to pass all her time at home over her sewing and broidery work, was much astonished at these words; but, seeing that her husband's command fell in well with her own desire, she did all she was directed to do, and set herself so well in order and decked herself so featly that she looked more like a goddess than like a mortal woman. And when Genobbia, following the command which her husband had laid upon her, had entered into the holy fane, there came thither likewise Nerino, the son of the king, and when he had looked upon her he found that she was exceedingly fair. When the

lady had gone her way, Messer Raimondo came upon the scene, and having gone up to Nerino spake thus: 'Now how does that lady who is just gone out of the church please you? Does she seem to you to be one who ought to be compared with any other? Say, is she not more beautiful than your mother?' 'Of a truth,' replied Nerino, 'she is fair, and nature could not possibly make aught that is fairer; but tell me of your courtesy of whom is she the wife, and where does she dwell?' But to this query Messer Raimondo did not answer so as to humour Nerino's wish, forasmuch as he had no mind to give him the clue he sought. Then said Nerino, 'My good Messer Raimondo, though you may not be willing to tell me who she is and where she dwells, at least you might do me such good office as to let me see her once more.' 'This I will do willingly,' answered Messer Raimondo. 'To-morrow come here again into the church, and I will so bring it to pass

that you shall see her as you have seen her to-day.'

When Messer Raimondo had gone back to his house, he said to his wife, 'Genobbia, see that you attire yourself to-morrow; for I wish that you should go to the mass in the Duomo, and if hitherto you have ever made yourself look beautiful or have arrayed yourself sumptuously, see that you do the same to-morrow.' When she heard this, Genobbia (as on the former occasion) was greatly astonished, but since the command of her husband pointed to this matter, she did everything even as he had ordered. When the morrow came, Genobbia, sumptuously clothed and adorned more richly than was her wont, betook herself to the church, and in a very short time Nerino came likewise. He, when he saw how very fair she was, was inflamed by love of her more ardently than ever man had burned for woman before, and, when Messer Raimondo arrived, begged him to tell straightway

what might be the name of this lady who seemed in his eyes to be so marvellously beautiful. But Messer Raimondo, making excuse that he was greatly pressed for time to give to his own affairs, was in no humour to thus inform Nerino on the spot, and was rather disposed to leave the galliard to stew for a time in his own fat; so he went his way in high spirits. Whereupon Nerino, with his temper somewhat ruffled by the mean account in which Messer Raimondo seemed to hold him, spake thus to himself: 'Aha! you are not willing that I should have an inkling as to who she is and where she lives, but I will know what I want to know in spite of you.'

After he had left the church, Nerino waited outside until such time as the fair dame should likewise issue forth, and then, having given her a modest obeisance with a smiling countenance, he went with her as far as her home. Now, as soon as Nerino had got to know clearly the house where she dwelt, he began to cast

amorous eyes upon her, and never a day passed on which he would not pass up and down ten times in front of her window. Wherefore, having a great desire to hold converse with her, he set about considering what course he should follow in order to keep unsullied the honour of the lady, and at the same time to attain his own end. But, having pondered over the affair, and looked at it on every side without lighting upon any course which seemed to promise security, he at last, after a mighty amount of imagining, determined to make the acquaintance of an old woman who lived in a house opposite to that occupied by Genobbia. After having sent to her certain presents, and settled and confirmed the compact between them, he went secretly into the old woman's lodging, in which there was a certain window overlooking the hall of Genobbia's house, where he might stand and gaze at his good convenience at the lady as she went up and down about the house ; at the same time, he had no wish

to divulge himself, and thereby give her any pretext for withdrawing herself from his sight. Nerino, having spent one day after another in these amorous glances, at last found himself no longer able to resist the burning desire within him which consumed his very heart ; so he made up his mind to write a letter and to throw it down into her lodging at a certain time when he should judge her husband to be away from home. And several times he wrote letters as he had planned and threw them down to her.

But Genobbia without reading the billet she picked up, cast it into the fire, and it was burnt. After she had done this several times, on a certain day it came into her mind to break open one of the notes and see what might be written therein. When she had broken the seal and marked that the writer was no other than Nerino, the son of the King of Portugal, who declared thereby his fervent love of her, she was at first wellnigh confounded, but after a little when she had

called to mind the poor cheer she enjoyed in her husband's house, she plucked up heart and began to look kindly upon Nerino. At last, having come to an agreement with him, she found means to bring him into the house, when the youth laid before her the story of the ardent love he bore her, and of the torments he endured every day on her account, and in like manner the way by which his passion for her had been kindled. Wherefore the lady, who was alike lovely and kind-hearted and complaisant, felt herself in no humour to reject his suit. And while the two thus foregathered, happy in the consciousness of mutual love and indulging in amorous discourse, lo and behold! Messer Raimondo knocked suddenly at the door. When Genobbia heard this she bade Nerino go straightway and lie down on the bed, and to let down the curtains, and to remain there until such time as her husband should be once more gone out. The husband came in, and having taken

divers trifles of which he had need, went away without giving heed to aught besides, and a little later Nerino followed him.

On the following day, when it happened that Nerino was walking up and down the piazza, Messer Raimondo by chance went that way, to whom Nerino made known by sign that he wanted to have a word with him. Wherefore, having approached him, he spake thus : ‘Signor, have I not a good bit of news to tell you?’ ‘And what may it be?’ replied Messer Raimondo. ‘Do I not know,’ said Nerino, ‘the house where dwells that beautiful lady? and have I not had some delightful intercourse with her? But because her husband came home unexpectedly she hid me in the bed, and drew the curtains for fear that he should see me; however, he soon went out again.’ ‘Is it possible?’ said Messer Raimondo. ‘Possible!’ answered Nerino, ‘it is more than possible — it is a fact. Never in all my life have I seen so delightful, so sweet a

lady as she. If by any chance, signor, you should meet her, I beg you to speak a good word on my behalf, and to entreat her to keep me in her good graces.' Messer Raimondo, having promised to do what the youth asked him, went his way with ill will in his heart. But before he left Nerino he said, 'And do you propose to go in search of your good fortune again?' To this Nerino replied, 'Return! what should one do in such case?' Then Messer Raimondo went back to his house, and was careful to let drop no word in his wife's presence, but to wait for the time when she and Nerino should again come together.

When the next day had come Nerino once more stole to a meeting with Genobbia, and while they were in the midst of their amorous delights and pleasant converse the husband came back to the house, but the lady quickly hid Nerino in a chest in front of which she heaped a lot of clothes from which she had been ripping the wadding to keep them from de-

struction by insects. The husband, making believe to search for certain things, turned the house upside down, and pried even into the bed, but, finding nothing of the sort he looked for, went about his business with his mind more at ease.

Very soon Nerino also departed, and afterwards, chancing to meet Messer Raimondo, he thus addressed him : ‘Signor doctor, what would you say if you heard I had paid another visit to my charming lady, and that envious fortune broke in upon our pleasure, seeing that the husband again arrived and spoilt all our sport?’ ‘And what did you then?’ said Messer Raimondo. ‘She straightway opened a chest,’ said Nerino, ‘and put me therein, and in front of the chest she piled up a heap of clothes which she was working at in order to preserve them from moth, and after he had turned the bed upside down more than once without finding aught, he went away.’ What tortures Messer Raimondo must have suffered when he listened to these words I leave

to the judgment of any who may know the humours of love.

Now Nerino had given to Genobbia a very fine and precious diamond, within the golden setting of which was engraved his name and his likeness. The very next day, when Messer Raimondo had gone to see to his affairs, the lady once more let Nerino into the house, and while they were taking their pleasure and talking pleasantly together, behold! the husband again came back to the house. But the crafty Genobbia, as soon as she remarked his coming, immediately opened a large wardrobe which stood in her chamber, and hid Nerino therein. Almost immediately Messer Raimondo entered the chamber, pretending as before that he was in search of certain things he wanted, and in quest thereof he turned the room upside down. But, finding nothing either in the bed or in the chest, like a man out of his wits he took fire and strewed it in the four corners of the chamber, with the intention of burning the place and all that it contained.

Now the party walls and the wooden framing of the apartment soon caught fire, whereupon Genobbia, turning to her husband, said : ‘ What is this you are doing, husband ? Surely you must be gone mad. Still, if you wish to burn up the room, burn it as you will, but by my faith I will not have you burn this wardrobe, wherein are all the papers relating to my dowry.’ So, having summoned four strong porters, she bade them carry the wardrobe out of the house and bear it into the neighboring house which belonged to the old woman. Then she opened the wardrobe secretly when no one was by and returned to her own house. Messer Raimondo, now like one out of his mind, still kept a sharp watch to see whether anybody who ought not to have been there might be driven out of hiding by the conflagration, but he met with nothing save the smoke, which was becoming insufferable, and the fierce flames which were consuming the house. And by this time all the neighbors had

gathered together to put out the fire, and so well and heartily did they work that in time it was extinguished.

On the following day, as Nerino was sallying forth towards the fields in the valley, he met Messer Raimondo, and after giving him a salute, said to him : 'Aha, my gentleman ! I have got a piece of news to tell you which ought to please you mightily.' 'And what may this news be ?' said Messer Raimondo. 'I have just made my escape,' said Nerino, 'from the most frightful peril that ever man came out of without loss of his life. I had gone to the house of my lovely mistress, and while I was spending the time with her in all manner of delightful dallying her husband once more broke in upon our content, and after he had turned the house upside down, lighted some fire, and this he scattered about in the four corners of the room and burnt up all the chattels that were about.' 'And you,' said Messer Raimondo, 'where were you the while ?' Then answered Nerino,

‘I was hidden in a wardrobe which she caused to be taken out of the house.’ And when Messer Raimondo heard this, and clearly understood all which Nerino told him to be the truth, he was like to die of grief and passion. Nevertheless, he did not dare to let his secret be known, because he was determined still to catch him in the act. Wherefore he said to him, ‘And are you bent upon going thither again, Signor Nerino?’ to which Nerino made answer, ‘Seeing that I have come safely out of the fire, what else is there for me to fear?’ And, letting pass any further remarks of this sort, Messer Raimondo begged Nerino that he would do him the honour of dining with him on the morrow ; which civility the young man willingly accepted.

When the next day had come, Messer Raimondo bade assemble at his house all his own relations and his wife’s as well, and prepared for their entertainment a rich and magnificent repast—not in the house which had been half

consumed by fire, but in another. He gave directions to his wife, moreover, that she also should be present, not to sit at table as a guest, but to keep herself out of sight, and see to the ordering of aught which might be required for the banquet. As soon as all the kinsfolk had assembled, and the young Nerino as well, they were bidden take their places at the board, and as the feast went on Messer Raimondo tried his best with his charlatan science to make Nerino drunk, in order to be able to work his will upon him. Having several times handed to the youth a glass of malvoisie wine, which he never failed to empty, Messer Raimondo said to him: ‘Now, Signor Nerino, cannot you tell to these kinsfolk of mine some little jest which may make them laugh?’ The luckless Nerino, who had no inkling that Genobbia was Messer Raimondo’s wife, began to tell the story of his adventures, keeping back, however, the names of all concerned.

It chanced at this moment that one of

the servants went into the room apart where Genobbia was, and said to her: 'Madonna, if only you were now hidden in some corner of the feasting-room, you would hear told the finest story you ever heard in your life. I pray you go in quick.' And, having stolen into a corner, she knew that the voice of the storyteller belonged to Nerino her lover, and that the tale he was giving to the company concerned himself and her as well. Whereupon this prudent and sharp-witted dame took the diamond which Nerino had given her, and, having placed it in a cup filled with a very dainty drink, she said to a servant, 'Take this cup and give it to Signor Nerino, and tell him to drink it off forthwith, that he may tell his story the better.' The servant took the cup, and placed it on the table, whereupon Nerino gave sign that he wished to drink therefrom; so the servant said to him, 'Take this cup, signor, so that you may tell your story the better.'

Nerino took the cup and forthwith

drank all the wine therein, when, seeing and recognizing the diamond which lay at the bottom, he let it pass into his mouth. Then making pretence of rinsing his teeth, he drew forth the ring and put it on his finger. As soon as he was well assured that the fair lady about whom he was telling his story was the wife of Messer Raimondo, he had no mind to say more, and when Messer Raimondo and his kinsfolk began to urge him to bring the tale which he had begun to an end, he replied, 'And then and there the cock crowed and the day broke, so I awoke from my sleep and heard nothing more.' Messer Raimondo's kinsmen, having listened to Nerino's story, and up to this time believed all he had said about the lady to be the truth, now imagined that both their host and the young man were drunk.

After several days had passed it happened that Nerino met Messer Raimondo, and feigning not to know that he was the husband of Genobbia, told him

that within the space of two days he would take his departure, because his father had written to him to bid him without fail to return to his own country. Whereupon Messer Raimondo wished him good speed for his journey. Nerino, having come to a private understanding with Genobbia, carried her off with him and fled to Portugal, where they long lived a gay life together; but Messer Raimondo, when he went back to his house and found that his wife was gone, was stricken with despair, and died in the course of a few days.

Isabella's fable pleased the ladies and gentlemen equally well, and they rejoiced especially that Messer Raimondo himself proved to be the cause of his own misfortune, and that the thing which he had courted had really fallen upon him. And when the Signora marked that this discourse was come to an end, she gave the sign to Isabella to finish her task in due order, and she, in no wise neglectful of the Signora's

command, gave the enigma which follows:

In the middle of the night,
Rises one with beard bedight.
Though no astrologer he be,
He marks the hours which pass and flee.
He wears a crown, although no king;
No priest, yet he the hour doth sing,
Though spurred at heel he is no knight;
No wife he calls his own by right,
Yet children many round him dwell.
Sharp wits you need this thing to tell.

Here the cleverly-devised enigma of Isabella came to an end, and although the various listeners went casting about in various directions, no one hit upon the exact truth except the somewhat haughty Lodovica, who, mindful of the slight which had of late been put upon her, rose to her feet and spake thus: "The enigma which our sister has set us to guess means nothing else than the cock, which is on the alert to crow while it is yet night; which wears a beard and has knowledge of the passage

of time, although he is no astrologer. He bears a crest instead of a crown, and is no king ; he sings the hours, yet is no priest. Besides this, he wears spurs on his heels ; he has no wife, and brings up the children of others, that is to say, the young chickens."

All the listeners commended this solution of Isabella's skilful enigma, especially Capello, who said : " Signora Isabella, Lodovica has given you back bread for your bannock,¹ seeing that a short time ago you very cleverly declared the meaning of her enigma and now she has mastered yours ; but for this reason you must not harbour malice one against another." Then Lodovica answered promptly, " Signor Bernardo, when the night time is come, I will pay you back yea for yea."²

But in order to keep the discourse within limits, the Signora imposed silence upon all, and, turning her face

¹ Orig., *pane per schiacciata*.

² Orig., *le renderò gnans per gnaf*.

towards Lionora, whose turn it was to tell the last story of the night, directed her to begin, with due courtesy, her fable, and the damsel, with the best grace in the world thus began.

THE FIFTH FABLE.

Flamminio Veraldo sets out from Ostia in search of Death, and, not finding it, meets Life instead ; this latter lets him see Fear and make trial of Death.



ANY are the men who with all care and diligence go searching narrowly for certain things, which, when they have gained them, they find of no value, and would gladly forego, fleeing therefrom with all speed, just as the devil flies from holy water. This was the case of Flamminio, who, when he went seeking Death, found Life, who made him see Fear and make trial of Death. All of which you will find clearly set forth in this fable.

In Ostia, an ancient city situated no great distance from Rome, there lived in former days, according to the common report, a young man of a nature rather weak and errant than stable and prudent, whose name was Flamminio Veraldo. He had heard it said over and over again that there was in all the world nothing more terrible and frightful than Death, the dark and inevitable one, seeing that he shows pity to none, having respect to no man, however poor or rich he may be. Wherefore, being filled with wonder at what he had heard, he determined by himself to find and to see with his own eyes what manner of thing this might be which men called Death. And having attired himself in coarse garments, and taken in hand a staff of strong cornel-wood well shod with iron, he set forth from Ostia. Flamminio, when he had travelled over many miles of road, came one day into a certain street, in the midst of which he espied, sitting in his stall, a cobbler

making shoes and gaiters, and this cobbler, although there was lying about a great quantity of his finished work, kept on steadily at his task of making yet more.

Flamminio, going up to the cobbler, said to him, 'God be with you, good master!' and to this the cobbler replied, 'You are right welcome here, my son.' Then said Flamminio, 'What is this task you labour at?' 'I labour indeed,' replied the cobbler, 'and toil hard that I may not languish in want.¹ Nevertheless, I am in want, and I weary myself over making shoes.' 'Why do you thus,' said Flamminio, 'seeing that you have so many pairs made already? What is the good of making more?' 'I make them,' said the cobbler, 'to wear myself, to sell for my own sustenance and for the sustenance of my little household, and in order that when I become an old man I may be able to live on the money I have made by my handicraft.' 'And what

¹ Orig., *stento per non stentare*.

will you do next?' asked Flamminio. 'After this,' said the cobbler, 'I shall die.' 'You will die!' cried Flamminio in reply. 'Yes,' said the cobbler. Then cried Flamminio, 'Oh, my good master! can you of your own knowledge tell me what may be this thing they call Death?' The cobbler answered, 'Of a truth I cannot.' 'What, have you never seen him?' said Flamminio. To this master cobbler made answer, 'I have never seen him, nor have I any wish to see him now, or to taste his quality. Moreover, all men say that he is the strangest and most terrible monster the world holds.' Then Flamminio said, 'At least you will be able of your knowledge to teach me and tell me where he abides, because day and night I wander over mountains and through valleys and swamps seeking him without ever hearing tidings as to where he may be found?' The cobbler answered, 'I know nothing as to where Death may dwell, nor where he is to be found, nor what he is made of; but if

you go on with your journey somewhat farther, peradventure you will find him.'

Whereupon Flamminió, having taken his leave, parted from the cobbler, and betook himself onwards to a spot where he came upon a dense and shadowy forest, and entered therein. In a certain place he saw a peasant, who, though he had already cut a vast pile of wood for burning, went on cutting more with all his might. And when they had exchanged greetings one with another, Flamminio said to him, 'My brother, what are you going to do with so vast a heap of wood as this?' And to this the peasant made answer, 'I am preparing it to kindle fire therewith in the winter that is coming, when we shall have snow and ice and villainous mist, so that I may be able to keep warm myself and my children, and to sell whatsoever may be to spare, and to buy with the profit thereof bread and wine and clothing, and all other things which may be necessary for our daily sustenance, and thus to pass our lives un-

til Death comes to fetch us.' 'Now, by your courtesy,' said Flamminio, 'could you tell me where this same Death is to be found?' 'Of a surety I cannot,' the peasant replied, 'seeing that I have never once seen him, nor do I know where he abides. I am here in this wood all the day long taking heed to my own affairs. Very few wayfarers come into these parts, and I know none of those who pass by.' 'What then shall I do to find him?' demanded Flamminio; and to this the peasant made answer, 'As to myself, I know not at all what to say to you nor how to direct you. I can only bid you to travel yet farther onward, and then peradventure you may meet with him.'

Having taken leave of the peasant, Flamminio departed and walked and walked until he came to a certain place where dwelt a tailor, who had a vast store of clothes upon the pegs, and a warehouse filled with all kinds of the finest garments. Said Flamminio to him, 'God be with you, my good master!'

and the tailor replied, 'And the same good wish to you.' 'What are you going to do with all this store of fair and sumptuous raiment, and all the noble garments I see here? Do they all belong to you?' Then the master tailor made answer, 'Certain of them are my own, some belong to the merchants, some to the gentlefolk, and some to various people who have dealings with me.' 'But what use can they find for so many?' asked Flamminio. 'They wear them in the different seasons of the year,' the tailor answered, and showing them all to Flamminio, he went on, 'These they wear in the summer and these in the winter, and these others in the seasons which come between, clothing themselves sometimes in one fashion and sometimes in another.' 'And in the end what do they do?' asked Flamminio. The tailor answered, 'They go on in this course until the day of their death.' Flamminio hearing the tailor speak of Death said, 'Oh, my good master! could you

tell me where I may find this Death you tell of?' The tailor, speaking as if he were inflamed with anger and perturbed in spirit, said: 'My son, you go about asking questions which are indeed strange. I surely cannot tell you nor direct you where he may abide, for I never let my thoughts turn to him, and it is an occasion of great offence to me when anyone begins to talk of him. Wherefore I bid you either to discourse of some other matter or to go your way, for all such talk as this displeases me vastly.' And Flamminio, having taken leave of the tailor, departed on his journey.

It came to pass that Flamminio, after he had traversed many lands, came at last to a desert and solitary place, where he found a hermit with his beard all matted with dirt, and his body worn away by the passage of the years and by fasting, letting his mind concern itself only in contemplation. Whereupon, thinking that assuredly he had at last found

Death, Flamminio thus addressed him :
‘ Of a truth, I am very glad to meet with you, holy father.’ ‘ The sight of you is welcome to me, my son,’ the hermit replied. ‘ My good father,’ said Flamminio, ‘ what do you here in this rough and uninhabitable spot, cut off from all pleasure and from all human society?’ ‘ I pass my time,’ answered the hermit, ‘ in prayers and in fastings and in contemplation.’ Then Flamminio inquired, ‘ And for what reason do you follow this life?’ ‘ Why, my son,’ exclaimed the hermit, ‘ I do all this to serve God, to mortify this wretched flesh of mine, to do penance for all the offences I have wrought in the sight of the eternal and immortal God and of the true son of Mary, and in the end to get salvation for my sinful soul, so that when the hour of my death shall come I may render it up pure of all stain, and in the awful day of judgment, by the grace of my Redeemer and by no merit of my own, may make myself worthy of that happy and glorious home

where I may taste the joys of eternal life, to which blessedness God lead us !' Then said Flamminio, 'Oh, my dear father ! spare a few words to tell me — if it be not an offence to you — what manner of thing is this Death, and after what fashion is it made ?' The holy father answered, 'Oh, my son ! trouble not yourself to gain knowledge of this thing you seek ; for Death is a very terrible and a fearful being, and is called by wise men the final end of all our sufferings, a misery to the happy, a happiness to the miserable, and the term and limit of all worldly things. It severs friend from friend ; it separates the father from the son, and the son from the father, the mother from the daughter, and the daughter from the mother. It cuts the marriage bond, and finally disunites the soul and the body, so that the body, severed from the soul, loses all its power and becomes so putrid and of so evil a savour that all men flee therefrom and abandon it as a thing abominable.' 'And have

you never set eyes on him, my father?’ asked Flamminio. ‘Of a certainty I have never seen him,’ answered the hermit. ‘But can you tell me what I should do in order to see him?’ asked Flamminio. ‘Ah, my son!’ said the hermit, ‘if you are indeed so keenly set on finding him, you have only to keep going further and further on; because man, the longer the way he has journeyed through this world, the nearer he is to Death.’ The young man having thanked the holy father, and received his benediction, went his way.

Then Flamminio, continuing his journey, traversed a great number of deep valleys and craggy mountains and inhospitable forests, seeing by the way many sorts of fearsome beasts, and questioning each one of these whether he was the thing called Death, and always getting in return the answer ‘No.’ At last, after he had passed through many lands and seen many strange things, he came to a mountain of no little magnitude,

and having climbed over this, he began to descend into a gloomy and very deep valley, closed in on all sides by profound caverns. Here he saw a strange and monstrous wild beast, which made all the valley re-echo with its roaring. 'Who are you?' said Flamminio. 'Ho! is it possible that you may be Death?' To which the wild beast made answer, 'I am not Death; but pursue your way, and soon you will find him.'

Flamminio, when he heard the answer he had so long desired to hear, felt his heart grow lighter. The wretched youth, now worn out by fatigue and half dead by reason of the long weariness and the heavy toil he had undergone, was almost sunk in despair, when he found himself on the borders of a wide and spacious plain. Having climbed to the summit of a little hill of no great height, delightful, and covered with flowers, he looked round about him, now here, now there, and espied the lofty walls of a magnificent city not far from the spot where he stood.

Whereupon he began to walk more rapidly with nimble steps, and when the shadows of evening were falling he came to one of the city gates, which was adorned with the finest white marble. And when he had entered therein, with the leave of the keeper of the gate, the first person he met was a very old woman, full of years, with a face like that of a corpse, and a body so meagre and thin that, through her leanness, it would have been easy to count one by one every bone in her body. Her forehead was thickly marked with wrinkles, her eyes were squinting, watery, and red, as if they had been dyed in purple, her cheeks all puckered, her lips turned inside out, her hands rough and callous ; her head was palsied, and she trembled in every limb ; she was bent almost double in her gait, and she was clad in rough and dusky clothes. Over and above this she bore by her left side a keen-edged sword, and carried in her right hand a weighty cudgel, at the end of which was wrought a point of iron

made in the shape of a triangle, and upon this staff she would now and then lean as if to rest herself. On her shoulders also she carried a large wallet, in which she kept a great store of phials and pots and bottles all filled with divers sorts of liquors and unguents and plasters fitted for the remedying of various human ailments and accidents. As soon as Flamminio's eye fell upon this toothless ugly old harridan he was seized with the thought that peradventure she might prove to be that Death to find whom he was going wandering about the world ; so having approached her he said, ' Ah, my good mother, may God keep and preserve you ! ' In a husky voice the old woman made answer to him, ' And may God keep and preserve you, my son ! ' ' Tell me, my mother,' Flamminio went on, ' whether perchance you may be the thing men call Death ? ' The old woman replied, ' No, I am not. On the other hand, I am Life ; and know, moreover, that I happen to have with me here in

this wallet which I carry behind my back certain liquors and unguents by the working of which I am able with ease to purify and to cure the mortal body of man of all the heavy diseases which afflict him, and in the short space of a single hour to relieve him in like manner from the torture of any pain he may feel.' Then said Flamminio, 'Ah, my good mother! can you not let me know where Death is to be found?' 'And who may you be,' asked the old woman, 'who make this demand of me with so great persistence?' Flamminio answered, 'I am a youth who has already spent many days and months and years wandering about in search of Death, and never yet have I been able to find in any land a man who could tell me aught concerning him. Wherefore, if you should happen to possess this knowledge, I beseech you of your courtesy to let me share it, because I am possessed by so keen a desire to look upon him and to know what he is like, in order that I may be certain whether

he really is the hideous and the dreadful thing which all men hold him to be.'

The old woman, when she heard the foolish request of the young man, spake thus to him: 'My son, when would it please you that I let you see Death, and judge how hideous he is, and when would you make trial of his terrors?' To this Flamminio replied: 'Ah, my mother! keep me no longer in suspense I beg you, but let me see him now, at this present moment.' Thereupon the old woman, to satisfy his desire, made him strip himself quite naked, and, while he was taking off his garments, she worked up together certain of her drugs useful in the cure of divers diseases, and when the thing was ready, she said to him: 'Bend yourself down here, my son.' And he, in obedience to her direction, bent down. 'Now bow your head and close your eyes;' and Flamminio did as she bade him. Scarcely had the old woman finished her speech than she took the sharp blade which she wore by her side and with one

blow struck off his head from his shoulders. Then she quickly took up the head, and, having replaced it upon the bust, she smeared it well with the plaster which she had prepared, and thereby the wound was quickly healed. But how the thing which now happened was caused I cannot say, whether it arose through the over-quickness of the old hag in putting back the head upon the shoulders, or whether she herself brought it to pass through her own craft. The head when it was joined once more to the body was put on hind part forward. Wherefore Flamminio, when he looked down upon his shoulders, his loins, and his big buttocks standing out (all of which things he had never seen hitherto), fell into such a fit of terror and dismay that, not being able to think of any place where he might be suffered to hide himself, he cried out to the old woman in a trembling dolorous voice : ‘ Alas, alas, my good mother ! bring me back once more to my old shape ; bring me back, for the love of

God, for by my faith I have never seen anything more frightful and more hideous than what I now behold. Alas ! deliver me from this miserable state in which I now find myself fixed. Alas ! alas ! do not delay your help, my sweet good mother. Lend me your aid, for I am sure you can help me easily if you will.' The cunning old woman still kept silence, feigning all the while to know nothing of the mischance that had been wrought, and letting the wretched fellow work himself into an agony and stew in his own fat ;¹ but at last, after having kept him in this plight for the space of two hours, she agreed to work the remedy he sought. So, having made him bend himself down as before, she put her hand to her sharp-cutting sword and struck off his head from his shoulders. Then she took the head in her hand, and, having placed it upon the trunk and smeared it well with her ointment, brought Flaminio back to his former condition.

¹ Orig., *cuocersi nel suo unto*.

The youth, when he perceived that he had once more become his old self, put on his clothes; and now, having seen what a terrible thing, and by his own experience proved what a hideous and ugly thing Death was, he made his way back to Ostia by the shortest and the quickest way he knew without saying any more farewell words to the old woman, occupying himself for the future in reaching after Life and flying from Death, devoting himself more diligently to the consideration of those matters which he had hitherto neglected.

It now only remained that Lionora should propose her enigma, so she gave out the following one in merry wise:

About a meadow fair and wide,
Gay decked with flowers on every side,
Three nymphs on task divine intent,
Pass to and fro, and firmly bent
To speed their work, nor night nor day
Take pause, nor rest upon their way.
One in her left the distaff plies,
Between another's feet swift flies
The spindle, and last one doth stand

With keen-edged weapon in her hand,
And cuts in twain the fragile strand.

This enigma was very easily understood by all the company, because it was clear that the fine and spacious meadow must be this world in which all men dwell. The three nymphs are the three sisters, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, who by the fancy of the poets are held to represent the beginning, the middle, and the end of our lives. Clotho, who holds the rock, shows forth our birth ; Lachesis who spins it, the season of our existence, and Atropos, who severs the thread just spun by Lachesis, inevitable Death.

Already the watchful cock, bird sacred to Mercury, had given signal by his crowing of the approaching dawn, when the Signora brought to an end the story-telling for the night, and all the guests departed to their own homes, pledged, however, to return on the following evening under whatever penalty the Signora might deem fitting to inflict.

The End of the Fourth Night.

Night the Fifth.



Night the Fifth.

THE sun, the glory of the smiling firmament, the measurer of our fleeting time, and the true eye of the universe, from whom likewise the horned moon and all the stars receive their radiance, had at last hidden his red and burning rays beneath the waters of the sea, and the chaste daughter of Latona, circled around by bright and beaming stars, was already lighting up the clustering shadows of the obscure night, and the shepherds, quitting the wide and open fields and the fresh herbage and the cool and limpid streams, had taken their way back with their flocks to their wonted folds, and, worn out and weary as they were, had sunk into deep slumber on the beds of soft and yielding rushes, when the fair

and noble troop of companions, letting go thought of everything else, hastened to the place of meeting. And when it had been signified to the Signora that all had come, and that it was now time to recommence the story-telling, she, escorted in courteous and reverent wise by the other ladies, went joyful and smiling with soft and measured step to the hall of meeting. Then having graciously greeted the company of friends with glad-some face, she ordered them to bring out the vase of gold. In this were put the names of five ladies, and of these the first to come out was that of Eritrea, the second that of Alteria, the third that of Lauretta, the fourth that of Arianna, and the last that of Cateruzza. When this was done they all began to dance to the music of the flutes, and to pass from one to another pleasant and loving words. Immediately after the end of the dance, three damsels, by leave of the Signora, began the following song.

SONG.

Madonna, when the springs of passion rise,
And through thy fair sweet bosom surge and
swell;
And in those lucent sacred eyes,
Which tell me I may live, and eke my death may
tell;
From those gracious looks and kind,
A gracious hope my longings find.
Now calm, and now spurred on by rage,
With hope and fear a fight I wage;
Eftsoons my hope the vantage gains,
And I am rid of all my pains,
And know no stroke of fate can lure,
Or drive me from my course secure.
Wherefore I bless the passing days;
Great nature, and the stars I praise,
That thy fair self my passion fired,
Thy service sweet my song inspired.

As soon as the three damsels had brought to an end their amorous canzonet, which seemed to break up the air around into sighs of passion, the Signora made a sign to Eritrea, who had been chosen for the first place this evening, that she should make a beginning of her story-telling. The damsel, seeing that

she could in no wise excuse herself, put aside all bashfulness, and began to speak in turn that the order which had hitherto prevailed might not be disturbed.

THE FIRST FABLE.

Guerrino, only son of Filippomaria, King of Sicily, sets free from his father's prison a certain savage man. His mother, through fear of the king, drives her son into exile, and him the savage man, now humanized, delivers from many and measureless ills.



HAVE heard by report, and likewise gathered from my own experience, most gracious and pleasure-loving ladies, that a kindly service done to another (although at the time the one served may seem in no sense grateful for the boon conferred) will more often than not come back to the doer thereof with abundant usury of benefit. Which thing happened to the son of a king who, having liberated from one of his father's prisons a wild man of the woods, was more than

once rescued from a violent death by the captive he had freed. This you will easily understand from the fable which I intend to relate to you, and for the love I bear to all of you I will exhort you never to be backward in aiding others; because, even though you be not repaid by those in whose behalf you have wrought, God Himself, the rewarder of all, will assuredly never leave your good deed unrecompensed; nay, on the contrary, He will make you partakers with Him of His divine grace.

Sicily, my dear ladies (as must be well known to all of you), is an island very fertile and complete in itself, and in antiquity surpassing all the others of which we have knowledge, abounding in towns and villages which render it still more beautiful. In past times the lord of this island was a certain king named Filippomaria, a man wise and amiable and of rare virtue, who had to wife a courteous, winsome, and lovely lady, the mother of his only son, who was called

Guerrino. The king took greater delight in following the chase than any other man in the country, and, for the reason that he was of a strong and robust habit of body, this diversion was well suited to him.

Now it happened one day that, as he was coming back from hunting in company with divers of his barons and huntsmen, he saw, coming out of a thick wood a wild man, tall and big and so deformed and ugly that they all looked upon him with amazement. In strength of body he seemed no whit inferior to any of them ; wherefore the king, having put himself in fighting trim, together with two of the most valiant of his barons, attacked him boldly, and after a long and doughty struggle overcame him and took him a prisoner with his own hands. Then, having bound him, they conveyed him back to the palace, and selected for him a safe lodging, fitted for the purpose, into which they cast him, and there under strong locks he was kept by the

king's command closely confined and guarded. And seeing that the king set high store upon his captive, he ordained that the keys of the prison should be held in charge by the queen, and never a day passed when he would not for pastime go to visit him.

Before many days had gone by the king once more put himself in array for the chase, and, having furnished himself with all the various things which are necessary thereto, he set forth with a gallant company of courtiers, but before he left he gave into the queen's care the keys of the prison. And during the time that the king was absent on his hunting a great longing came over Guerrino, who was at that season a young lad, to see the wild man of the woods; so having betaken himself all alone, carrying his bow, in which he delighted greatly, to the prison grating, the creature saw him and straightway began to converse with him in decent orderly fashion. And while they talked thus, the wild man, who was caressing

the boy, dexterously snatched out of his hand the arrow, which was richly ornamented. Whereupon the boy began to weep, and could not keep back his tears, crying out that the savage ought to give him back his arrow. But the wild man said to him : ‘ If you will open the door and let me go free from this prison I will give you back your arrow, but if you refuse I will not let you have it.’ The boy answered, ‘ How would you that I should open the door for you and set you free, seeing that I have not the means therefor.’ Then said the wild man, ‘ If indeed you were in the mood to release me and to let me out of this narrow cell, I would soon teach you the way in which it might be done.’ ‘ But how?’ replied Guerrino ; ‘ tell me the way.’ To which the wild man made answer : ‘ Go to the chamber of the queen your mother, and when you see that she is taking her mid-day sleep, put your hand softly under the pillow upon which she is resting, and take therefrom the keys of the prison in

such wise that she shall not notice the theft, and bring them here and open my prison door. When you shall have done this I will give you back your arrow forthwith, and peradventure at some future time I may be able to make you a return for your kindness.'

Guerrino, wishing beyond everything to get back his gilded dart, did everything that the wild man had told him, and found the keys exactly as he had said, and with these in his hand he returned to the prison, and said to him : 'Behold ! here are the keys ; but if I let you out of this place you must go so far from hence that not even the scent of you may be known, for if my father, who is a great huntsman, should find you and capture you again, he would of a surety kill you out of hand.' 'Let not that trouble you, my child,' said the captive, 'for as soon as ever you shall open the prison and see me a free man, I will give you back your arrow and will get me away into such distant parts that neither

your father nor any other man shall ever find me.' Guerrino, who had all the strength of a man, worked away at the door, and finally threw open the prison, when the wild man, having given back to him his arrow and thanked him heartily, went his way.

Now this wild man had been formerly a very handsome youth, who, through despair at his inability to win the favour of the lady he ardently loved, let go all dreams of love and urbane pursuits, and took up his dwelling amongst beasts of the forest, abiding always in the gloomy woods and bosky thickets, eating grass and drinking water after the fashion of a brute. On this account the wretched man had become covered with a great fell of hair; his skin was hard, his beard thick and tangled and very long, and, through eating herbs and grass, his beard, his hairy covering, and the hair of his head had become so green that they were quite monstrous to behold.

As soon as ever the queen awoke from

her slumbers she thrust her hand under her pillow to seek for the keys she had put there, and, when she found they were gone, she was terrified amain, and having turned the bed upside down without meeting with any trace of them, she ran straightway like one bereft of wit to the prison, which was standing open. When on searching further she found no sign of the wild man, she was so sore stricken with grief and fear that she was like to die, and, having returned to the palace, she made diligent search in every corner thereof, questioning the while now this courtier and now that as to who the presumptuous and insolent varlet was who had been brazen enough to lay hands upon the keys of the prison without her knowledge. To this questioning they one and all declared that they knew nought of the matter which thus disturbed her. And when Guerrino met his mother, and remarked that she was almost beside herself in a fit of passion, he said to her: ‘Mother, see that you

cast no blame on any of these in respect to the opening of the prison door, because if punishment is due to any thereanent it is due to me, for I, and I alone, unlocked it.' The queen, when she heard these words, was plunged in deeper sorrow than ever, fearing lest the king, when he should come back from his hunting, might kill his son through sheer anger at the fault he had committed, seeing that he had given into her charge the keys, to guard them as precious as her own person. Wherefore the queen in her desire to escape the consequences of a venial mistake fell into another error far more weighty, for without the shortest delay she summoned two of her most trusty servants, and her son as well, and, having given to them a great quantity of jewels and much money and divers fine horses, sent him forth to seek his fortune, at the same time begging the servants most earnestly to take the greatest care of Guerrino.

A very short time after the son had

departed from the presence of his mother, the king came back to the palace from following the chase, and as soon as he had alighted from his horse he betook himself straightway to the prison to go and see the wild man, and when he found the door wide open and the captive gone, and no trace of him left behind, he was forthwith inflamed with such violent anger that he determined in his mind to cause to be slain without fail the person who had wrought such a flagrant misdeed. And, having sought out the queen, who was sitting overcome with grief in her chamber, he commanded her to tell him what might be the name of the impudent, rash, and presumptuous varlet who had been bold enough of heart to open the doors of the prison and thereby give opportunity to the wild man of the woods to make his escape. Whereupon the queen, in a meek and trembling voice, made answer to him : ‘O sire ! be not troubled on account of this thing, for Guerrino our son (as he

himself has made confession to me) admits that he has done this.' And then she told to the king everything that Guerrino had said to her, and he, when he heard her story, was greatly incensed with rage. Next she told him that, on account of the fear she felt lest he should slay his son, she had sent the youth away into a far distant country, accompanied by two of their most faithful servants, and carrying with him rich store of jewels and of money sufficient to serve their needs. The king, when he listened to this speech of the queen, felt one sorrow heaping itself upon another, and he came within an ace of falling to the ground or of losing his wits, and, if it had not been for the courtiers who fell upon him and held him back, he would assuredly have slain his unhappy queen on the spot.

Now when the poor king had in some measure recovered his composure and calmed the fit of unbridled rage which had possessed him, he said to the queen :

‘Alas, my wife! what fancy was this of yours which induced you to send away into some unknown land our son, the fruit of our mutual love? Is it possible that you imagined I should hold this wild man of greater value than one who was my own flesh and blood?’ And without awaiting any reply to these remarks of his, he bade a great troop of soldiers mount their horses forthwith, and, after having divided themselves into four companies, to make a close search and endeavour to find the prince. But all their inquest was in vain, seeing that Guerrino and his attendants had made their journey secretly, and had let no one know who they might be.

Guerrino, after he had ridden far and traversed divers valleys and mountains and rivers, making a halt now in one spot and now in another, attained at last his sixteenth year, and so fair a youth was he by this time that he resembled nothing so much as a fresh morning rose.

But after a short time had passed, the

servants who accompanied him were seized with the devilish thought of killing him, and then taking the store of jewels and money and parting it amongst themselves. This wicked plot, however, came to nought, because by the working of divine justice they were not able to agree amongst themselves. For by good fortune it happened that, one day while they were devising this wickedness, there rode by a very fair and graceful youth, mounted upon a superb steed, and accoutred with the utmost magnificence. This youth bowed and graciously saluted Guerrino, and thus addressed him : ‘Most gracious sir, if it should not prove distasteful to you, I would fain make my journey in your company.’ And to this Guerrino replied : ‘Your courtesy in making your request will not permit me to refuse it and the pleasure of your company. Therefore I give you cordial thanks, and I beg you as a special favour that you will accompany us on our road. We are strangers in this country and

know but little of its highways, and you may be able of your kindness to direct our paths therein. Moreover, as we ride on together we can discuss the various chances which have befallen us, and thus our journey will be less irksome.'

Now this young man was no other than the wild man whom Guerrino had set free from the prison of King Filippomaria his father. This youth, after wandering through various countries and strange lands, met one day by chance a very lovely and benignant fairy, who was at that time suffering from a certain distemper. She, when she looked upon him and saw how misshapen and hideous he was, laughed so violently at the sight of his ugliness that she caused to burst an imposthume which had formed in the vicinity of her heart—an ailment which might well have caused her death by suffocation. And at that very moment she was delivered from all pain and trouble of this infirmity, as if she had never been afflicted therewith in the past, and re-

stored to health. Wherefore the good fairy, in recompense for so great a favour done to her, said to him, not wishing to appear ungrateful to him: 'O thou creature, who art now so deformed and filthy, since thou hast been the means of restoring to me my health which I so greatly desired, go thy ways, and be thou changed from what thou art into the fairest, the wisest, and the most graceful youth that may anywhere be found. And, besides this, I make you the sharer with me of all the power and authority conferred upon me by nature, whereby you will be able to do and to undo whatsoever you will according to your desire.' And having presented to him a noble horse endowed with magic powers, she gave him leave to go whithersoever he would.

Thus as Guerrino journeyed along with the young man, knowing nothing as to who he might be, but well known of him the while, they came at last to a mighty and strong city called Irlanda, over which at that time ruled King Zifroi. This

King Zifroi was the father of two daughters, graceful to look upon, of modest manners, and in beauty surpassing Venus herself, one of them named Potentiana and the other Eleuteria. They were held so dear by the king their father, that he could see by no other eyes than theirs. As soon as Guerrino entered the city of Irlanda with the unknown youth and with his train of servants, he hired a lodging of a certain householder who was the wittiest fellow in the whole of Irlanda, and who treated his guests with cheer of the best. And on the day following, the unknown youth made believe that he must needs depart and travel into another country, and went to take leave of Guerrino, thanking him in hearty wise for the boon of his company and good usage, but Guerrino, who had conceived the strongest love and friendship for him, would on no account let him go, and showed him such strong evidence of his good feeling that in the end the young man agreed to tarry with him.

In the country round about Irlanda there lived at this time two very fearful and savage animals, one of which was a wild horse, and the other a mare of like nature, and so ferocious and cruel were these beasts that they not only ravaged and devastated all the fair cultivated fields, but likewise killed all the animals and the men and women dwelling therein. And through the ruin wrought by these beasts the country had come to such piteous condition that no one was found willing to abide there, so that the peasants abandoned their farms and the homes which were dear to them and betook themselves to find dwelling-places in another land. And there was nowhere to be found any man strong and bold enough to face them, much less to fight with them and slay them. Wherefore the king, seeing that the whole country was being made desolate of all victuals, and of cattle, and of human creatures, and not knowing how to devise any remedy for this wretched pass, gave way to dolor-

ous lamentations, and cursed the hard and evil fortune which had befallen him. The two servants of Guerrino, who during the journey had not been able to carry out their wicked intent through want of concord between themselves, and on account of the arrival of the unknown youth, now deliberated how they might compass Guerrino's death and remain possessors of the money and jewels, and said one to the other : ' Let us now see and take counsel together how we may easiest take the life of our master.' But not being able to find any means thereto which seemed fitting, seeing that they would stand in peril of losing their own lives by the law if they should kill him, they decided to speak privily with their host and to tell him that Guerrino was a youth of great prowess and valour ; furthermore, that he had often boasted in their presence that he would be ready to slay this wild horse without incurring any danger to himself. Thus they reasoned with themselves : ' Now this saying may

easily come to the ears of the king, who, being so keenly set on the destruction of these two animals and on safeguarding the welfare of his country, will straightway command them to bring Guerrino before him, and will then inquire of the youth in what manner he means to accomplish this feat. Then Guerrino, knowing nothing what to say or to do, will at once be put to death by the king, and we shall remain sole masters of the jewels and the money.' And they forthwith set to work to put this wicked plan of theirs into action.

The host, when he listened to this speech, rejoiced amain, and was as glad as any man in all the world, and without losing a moment of time he ran swiftly to the palace, and having knelt down before the king and made due reverence, he said to him secretly, 'Gracious king, I have come to tell you that there is at present sojourning in my hostel a fair and gallant knight errant, who is called by name Guerrino. Now whilst I was

confabulating about divers matters with his servants they told me, amongst other things, how their master was a man of great prowess and well skilled in the use and practice of arms, and that in this our time one might search in vain to find another who could be compared with him. Moreover, they had many and many a time heard him boast that of his strength and valour he could without difficulty overcome and slay the wild horse which is working such dire loss and damage to your kingdom.'

When King Zifroi heard these words he immediately gave command that Guerrino should be brought before him. Whereupon the innkeeper, obedient to the word of the king, returned at once to his inn and said to Guerrino that he was to betake himself alone into the presence of the king, who greatly desired to speak with him. When Guerrino heard this he went straightway to the palace and presented himself to the king, and after saluting him with becoming reverence

begged to be told for what reason he had been honoured with the royal commands. To this Zifroi the king made answer: 'Guerrino, the reason which has induced me to send for you is that I have heard you are a knight of great valour, and one excelling all the other knights now alive in the world. They tell me, too, that you have many and many a time declared that you are strong and valorous enough to overcome and slay the wild horse which is working such cruel ruin and devastation to this my kingdom, without risk of hurt to yourself or to others. If you can pluck up courage enough to make trial of an emprise so full of honour as this, and prove yourself a conqueror, I promise you by this head of mine to bestow upon you a gift which will make you a happy man for the rest of your days.'

Guerrino, when he heard this proposition of the king, so grave and weighty, was mightily amazed, and at once denied that he had ever spoken such words as

had been attributed to him. The king, who was greatly disconcerted at this answer of Guerrino, thus addressed him : ‘ Guerrino, it is my will that you should without delay undertake this task, and be sure if you refuse and fail to comply with my wishes I will take away your life.’ The king, having thus spoken, dismissed from his presence Guerrino, who returned to his inn overwhelmed with deep sorrow, which he did not dare to disclose to anyone. Whereupon the unknown youth, marking that Guerrino, contrary to his wont, was plunged in melancholy, inquired the reason why he was so sad and full of grief. Then Guerrino, on account of the brotherly love subsisting between them, and finding himself unable to refuse this just and kind request, told him word for word everything that had happened to him. As soon as the unknown youth heard this, he said, ‘ Be of good cheer, and put aside all doubts and fears, for I will point out to you a way by which you will save

your life, and be a conqueror in your enterprise, and fulfil the wishes of the king. Return, therefore, to the king, and beg of him to grant you the service of a skilful blacksmith. Then order this smith to make for you four horseshoes, which must be thicker and broader by the breadth of two fingers than the ordinary measure of horseshoes, well roughed, and each one to be fitted behind with two spikes of a finger's length and sharpened to a point. And when these shoes are prepared, you must have my horse, which is enchanted, shod therewith, and then you need have no further fear of anything.'

Guerrino, after he had heard these words, returned to the presence of the king, and told him everything as the young man had directed him. The king then caused to be brought before him a well-skilled marshal smith, to whom he gave orders that he should carry out whatever work Guerrino might require of him. When they had gone to the

smith's forge, Guerrino instructed him how to make the four horseshoes according to the words of the young stranger, but when the smith understood in what fashion he was required to make these shoes, he mocked at Guerrino, and treated him like a madman, for this way of making shoes was quite strange and unknown to him. When Guerrino saw that the marshal smith was inclined to mock him, and unwilling to serve him as he had been ordered, he went once more to the king, and complained that the smith would not carry out his directions. Wherefore the king bade them bring the marshal before him, and gave him express command that, under pain of his highest displeasure, he should at once carry out the duties which had been imposed upon him, or, failing this, he himself should forthwith make ready to carry out the perilous task which had been assigned to Guerrino. The smith, thus hard pressed by the orders of the king, made the horseshoes in the way described

by Guerrino, and shod the horse therewith.

When the horse was thus shod and well-accoutred with everything that was necessary for the enterprise, the young stranger addressed Guerrino in these words: ‘Now mount quickly this my horse, and go in peace, and as soon as you shall hear the neighing of the wild horse dismount at once, and, having taken off from him his saddle and his bridle, let him range at will. You yourself climb up into a high tree, and there await the issue of the enterprise.’ Guerrino, having been fully instructed by his dear companion in all that he ought to do, took his leave, and departed with a light heart.

Already the glorious news had been spread abroad through all the parts of Irlanda how a valiant and handsome young knight had undertaken to subjugate and capture the wild horse and to present him to the king, and for this reason everyone in the city, men and

women alike, all flew to their windows to see him go by on his perilous errand. When they marked how handsome and young and gallant he was, their hearts were moved to pity on his account, and they said one to another, ‘ Ah, the poor youth ! with what a willing spirit he goes to his death. Of a surety it is a piteous thing that so valiant a youth should thus wretchedly perish.’ And they could none of them keep back their tears on account of the compassion they felt.

But Guerrino, full of manly boldness, went on his way blithely, and when he had come to the spot where the wild horse was wont to abide, and heard the sound of his neigh, he got down from his own horse, and having taken the saddle and bridle therefrom he let him go free, and himself climbed up into the branches of a great oak, and there awaited the fierce and bloody contest.

Scarcely had Guerrino climbed up into the tree when the wild horse appeared and forthwith attacked the fairy horse,

and then the two beasts engaged in the fiercest struggle that the world had ever seen, for they rushed at one another as if they had been two unchained lions, and they foamed at the mouth as if they had been bristly wild-boars pursued by savage and eager hounds. Then, after they had fought for some time with the greatest fury, the fairy horse dealt the wild horse two kicks full on the jaw, which was put out of joint thereby; wherefore the wild horse was at once disabled, and could no longer either fight or defend himself. When Guerrino saw this he rejoiced greatly, and having come down from the oak, he took a halter which he had brought with him and secured the wild horse therewith, and led him with his dislocated jaw back to the city, where he was welcomed by all the people with the greatest joy. According to his promise he presented the horse to the king, who, together with all the inhabitants of the city, held high festival, and rejoiced amain over the gallant deed wrought by Guerrino.

But the servants of Guerrino were greatly overcome with grief and confusion, inasmuch as their evil designs had miscarried; wherefore, inflamed with rage and hatred, they once more let it come to the hearing of King Zifroi that Guerrino had vaunted that he could with the greatest ease kill the wild mare also whenever it might please him. When the king heard this he laid exactly the same commands on Guerrino as he had done in the matter of the horse, and because the youth refused to undertake this task, which appeared to him impossible, the king threatened to have him hung up by one foot as a rebel against his crown. After Guerrino had returned to his inn, he told everything to his unknown companion, who smilingly said: ‘My good brother, fret not yourself because of this, but go and find the marshal smith, and command him to make for you four more horseshoes, as big again as the last, and see that they are duly furnished with good sharp spikes. Then you must follow

exactly the same course as you took with the horse, and you will return here covered with greater honour than ever.' When therefore he had commanded to be made the sharply-spiked horseshoes, and had caused the valiant fairy horse to be shod therewith, he set forth on his gallant enterprise.

As soon as Guerrino had come to the spot where the wild mare was wont to graze, and heard her neighing, he did everything exactly in the same manner as before, and when he had set free the fairy horse, the mare came towards it and attacked it with such fierce and terrible biting that it could with difficulty defend itself against such an attack. But it bore the assault valiantly, and at last succeeded in planting so sharp and dexterous a kick on the mare that she was lamed in her right leg, whereupon Guerrino came down from the high tree into which he had climbed, and having captured her, bound her securely. Then he mounted his own horse and rode back to the pal-

ace, where he presented the wild mare to the king, amidst the rejoicings and acclamations of all the people. And everyone, attracted by wonderment and curiosity, ran to see this wild beast, which, on account of the grave injuries she had received in the fight, soon died. And by these means the country was freed from the great plague which had for so long a time vexed it.

Now when Guerrino had returned to his hostel, and had betaken himself to repose somewhat on account of the weariness which had come over him, he found that he was unable to get any sleep by reason of a strange noise which he heard somewhere in the chamber. Wherefore, having risen from his couch, he perceived that there was something, I know not what, beating about inside a pot of honey, and not able to get out. So Guerrino opened the honey-pot, and saw within a large hornet, which was struggling with its wings without being able to free itself from the honey around it. Moved by

pity, he took hold of the insect and let it go free.

Now Zifroi the king had as yet given to Guerrino no reward for the two valiant deeds which he had wrought, but he was conscious in his heart that he would be acting in a very base fashion were he to leave such great valour without a rich guerdon, so he caused Guerrino to be called into his presence, and thus addressed him : ‘ Guerrino, by your noble deeds the whole of my kingdom is now free from the scourge, therefore I intend to reward you for the great benefits you have wrought in our behalf ; but as I can conceive of no other gift which would be worthy and sufficient for your merits, I have determined to give you one of my two daughters to wife. But you must know that of these two sisters one is called Potentiana, and she has hair braided in such marvellous wise that it shines like golden coils. The other is called Eleuteria, and her tresses are of such texture that they flash brightly like

the finest silver. Now if you can guess — the maidens being closely veiled the while — which is she of the golden tresses, I will give her to you as your wife, together with a mighty dowry of money ; but if you fail in this, I will have your head struck off your shoulders.’

Guerrino, when he heard this cruel ordeal which was proposed by Zifroi the king, was mightily amazed, and turning to him spake thus : ‘ O gracious sovereign ! Is this a worthy guerdon for all the perils and fatigues I have undergone ? Is this a reward for the strength I have spent on your behalf ? Is this the gratitude you give me for having delivered your country from the scourge by which it was of late laid desolate ? Alas ! I did not merit this return, which of a truth is not a deed worthy of such a mighty king as yourself. But since this is your pleasure and I am helpless in your hands, you must do with me what pleases you best.’ ‘ Now go,’ said Zifroi, ‘ and tarry no longer in my presence.

I give you till to-morrow to come to a decision.'

When Guerrino went out of the king's presence full of sadness, he sought his dear companion, and repeated to him everything that the king had said. The unknown youth when he heard this seemed but little troubled thereanent, and said : 'Guerrino, be of good cheer, and do not despair, for I will deliver you from this great danger. Remember how a few days ago you set free the hornet which you found with its wings entangled in the honey. Now this same hornet will be the means of saving you, for to-morrow, after the dinner at the palace, when you are put to the test, it will fly three times buzzing and humming round the head of her with the golden hair, and she with her white hands will drive it away. And you, when you shall have marked her do this action three times, may know for certain that this is she who is to be your wife.' 'Ah me!' cried Guerrino to his companion, 'when will

the time come when I shall be able to make you some repayment for all the kind offices you have done me? Certes, were I to live for a thousand years, I should never have it in my power to recompense you the very smallest portion thereof. But that one, who is the rewarder of all, will in this matter make up for me in that respect in which I am wanting.' To this speech of Guerrino his companion made answer : ' Guerrino, my brother, there is in sooth no need for you to trouble yourself about making any return to me for the services I may have wrought you, but assuredly it is now full time that I should reveal to you, and that you should know clearly who I am. For in the same fashion as you delivered me from death, I on my part have desired to render to you the recompense you deserve so highly at my hands. Know, then, that I am the wild man of the woods whom you, with such loving compassion, set free from the prison-house of the king your father, and that

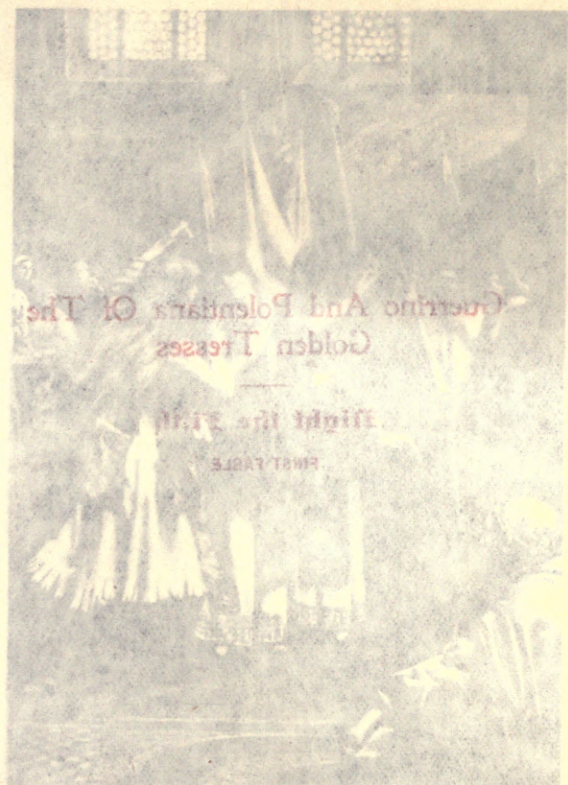
I am called by name Rubinetto.' And then he went on to tell Guerrino by what means the fairy had brought him back into his former state of a fair young man. Guerrino, when he heard these words, stood like one bemused, and out of the great tenderness and pity he had in his heart he embraced Rubinetto, weeping the while, and kissed him, and claimed him as his own brother.

And forasmuch as the day was now approaching for Guerrino to solve the question to be set to him by King Zifroi, the two repaired to the palace, whereupon the king gave order that his two beloved daughters, Potentiana and Eleuteria, should be brought into the presence of Guerrino covered from head to foot with white veils, and this was straightway done. When the two daughters had come in so much alike in seeming that it was impossible to tell the one from the other, the king said: 'Now which of these two, Guerrino, do you will that I should give you to wife?'

But Guerrino stood still in a state of doubt and hesitation, and answered nothing, but the king, who was mightily curious to see how the matter would end, pressed him again to speak, crying out that time was flying, and that it behoved him to give his answer at once. To this Guerrino made answer : ‘ Most sacred majesty, time forsooth may be flying, but the end is not yet come to this day, which is the limit you have given me for my decision.’ And all those standing by affirmed that Guerrino only claimed his right.

When, therefore, the king and Guerrino and all the others had stood for a long time in expectation, behold ! there suddenly appeared a hornet, which at once began to fly and buzz round the head and the fair face of Potentiana of the golden hair. And she, as if she were afear'd of the thing, raised her hand to drive it away, and when she had done this three times the hornet flew away out of sight. But even after this sign Guer-

rino remained uncertain for a short time, although he had full faith in the words of Rubinetto, his well-beloved companion. Then said the king, 'How now, Guerrino, what do you say? The time has now come when you must put an end to this delay, and make up your mind.' And Guerrino, having looked well first at one and then at the other of the maidens, put his hand on the head of Potentiana, who had been pointed out to him by the hornet, and said, 'Gracious king, this one is your daughter of the golden tresses.' And when the maiden had raised her veil it was clearly proved that it was indeed she, greatly to the joy of all those who were present, and to the satisfaction of the people of the city. And Zifroi the king gave her to Guerrino as his wife, and they did not depart thence until Rubinetto had wedded the other sister. After this Guerrino declared himself to be the son of Filippomaria, King of Sicily, hearing which Zifroi was greatly rejoiced, and caused the marriages



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Guerrino And Polentiana Of The Golden Tresses

Night the Fifth

FIRST FABLE

FIRST FABLE

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to be celebrated with the greatest pomp and magnificence.

When this news came to the father and the mother of Guerrino they felt the greatest joy and contentment, seeing that they had by this time given up their son as lost. When he returned to Sicily with his dear wife and his well-loved brother and sister-in-law, they all received a gracious and loving welcome from his father and mother, and they lived a long time in peace and happiness, and he left behind him fair children as the heirs of his kingdom.

This touching story told by Eritrea won the highest praise of all the hearers, and she, when she saw that all were silent, proposed her enigma in the following words:

A cruel beast of nature dread
From out a tiny germ is bred.
In hate all beings else it holds,
And each one trembles who beholds
Its form of fear. Death all around
It spreads, and oft itself is found
The victim of its fatal rage,
And war on all the world will wage.

Beneath its breath the trees decay,
The living plants will fade away.
A beast more cruel, fierce, and fell,
Ne'er rose from out the pit of hell.

When the enigma set to the worshipful company by the clever damsel had been considered and highly praised by everyone, some found one solution therefor and some another, but not one of them gave the one which rightly explained its meaning. Wherefore Eritrea, seeing that her riddle had not been understood, said, "It seems to me that the cruel animal I have described cannot be anything else than the basilisk, which hates all other living beasts in the world, and slays them with its sharp and piercing glances. And if peradventure it should chance to see its own form mirrored anywhere, it straightway dies." When Eritrea had come to the end of the interpretation of her enigma, the Signor Evangelist,¹ who sat by her side, said to her smiling: "Of a truth you

¹ Pietro Bembo.

yourself are this basilisk, signora, for with your beautiful eyes you bring soft death to all those who gaze upon you." But Eritrea, with her cheeks suffused with the lovely tint of nature, answered nought. Alteria sat near by, and, as soon as she perceived that the enigma was now completed, having been highly praised by all, she called to mind that it was now her turn to tell a story according to the Signora's pleasure, so she began in the following wise a fable which proved in the end to be fully as mirthful as it was commendable.

THE SECOND FABLE.

Adamantina, the daughter of Bagolana Sabonese, by the working of a certain doll becomes the wife of Drusiano, King of Bohemia.



O powerful, so commanding, so subtle is the wit of man that without doubt it may be held to overtop and to exceed every other human force to be found in the

world ; wherefore it has been said, not without just cause, that the wise man is the governor of the stars. This saying recalls to my memory a fable, by the telling of which I hope to make quite clear to you how a young girl, of mean estate and very poor, was succoured by fortune, and in the end became the wife of a mighty king. Although my fable will be very short, it may, if I mistake not, be found to be none the less pleasing and diverting on that account. I beg you therefore to lend me your ears attentively, and listen to me, as hitherto you have listened to our very worthy associates, who, of a surety, have merited from you praise rather than blame.

In the country of Bohemia, dear ladies, there lived not a long time ago a little old woman known by the name of Bagolana Savonese, miserably poor in her way of life, and the mother of two daughters, one of whom was called Cassandra and the other Adamantina. Now this woman, though she had scarce any-

thing to call her own, was anxious to set her affairs in order, so that she might die in peace, and as the whole of the wealth that she had to dispose of in her house and out of it consisted of a small coffer filled with tow, she made her will and gave this coffer and what it contained to her two daughters, begging them at the same time to live peacefully together after she should be dead.

These two sisters, though they were very poor in any of the endowments of fortune, were by no means wanting in mental gifts, so that in all virtues and in righteous behaviour they were no whit inferior to other women. After the old woman was dead and her body had been buried, Cassandra, who was the elder sister of the two, took a pound of the tow and sat down and began to spin the same with great care, and, as soon as she had spun it, she gave the thread she had made to Adamantina, her younger sister, bidding her to take it out into the piazza and to sell it, and with the proceeds of

the sale to purchase some bread wherewith they might keep themselves alive. Thereupon Adamantina took the thread, and, having put it under her arm, she went her way into the piazza to sell her wares, according to the commandment of her sister Cassandra; but, as chance would have it, what she did ran entirely counter to her own wishes and to those of her sister, for as she was walking in the piazza she happened to meet there an old woman who was carrying in her apron the most beautiful and most perfectly made doll that had ever been seen. So much indeed was Adamantina's fancy taken by the doll that, after she had looked at it and feasted her eyes upon it, her thoughts were more occupied in considering how she might become the owner thereof, than how she should dispose of her yarn. Therefore Adamantina, letting her thoughts run on in this wise, and not knowing how to get possession of the doll by anything she might say or do, made up her mind

at last to tempt fortune and to see whether she could not obtain the doll through exchange. So having gone up to the old woman she spake thus: 'Good mother, if it seem a fair thing to you, I will gladly give you this thread of mine in barter for your doll.' The old woman, when she saw that this fine handsome young girl was so eager to have the doll for her own, was not disposed to baulk her fancy; so, having taken the thread, she handed the doll over to Adamantina.

As soon as the girl could call the doll her own, she went back to her home as joyous and content as anyone in all the world, and her sister Cassandra, when she saw her, at once inquired of her whether she had sold the yarn. To this Adamantina replied that she had sold it. 'But where is the bread which you have bought with the price you got for the thread?' inquired Cassandra. Then Adamantina opened wide the apron she was wearing and showed Cassandra the doll which

she had got by barter of her own ware. Cassandra, who was sorely hungry and eager for the bread, when she saw the doll was filled with such violent anger and indignation that she seized Adamantina by the hair of her head, and belaboured her so grievously with cuffs and blows that the unfortunate girl could scarcely move. Adamantina took the blows with patience, and, without making any attempt to defend herself, she went away and hid herself in another room, taking her doll with her.

When the evening had come Adamantina, according to the habit of young girls, sat down by the fireside, and, having taken some oil out of the lamp, she anointed therewith the doll's stomach and loins. Then she wrapped the doll carefully in some bits of tattered cloth, and placed it in her own bed, and a very short time afterwards she went to bed herself and lay down beside the doll. Scarcely had Adamantina fallen into her first sleep when the doll began to cry

out: 'The stool, mother, the stool.' Whereupon Adamantina, wakening from her sleep, said: 'What is the matter with you, my daughter?' and to this the doll replied in the same words as before. Then Adamantina said: 'Wait a little, my daughter;' and she straightway arose and ministered to the doll as if it had been a young child, and to her amazement she found that the doll filled the stool with a great quantity of coins of all sorts.

As soon as Adamantina saw what had happened she straightway awakened her sister Cassandra and showed her the money which had come to her in this strange fashion. Cassandra, when she marked what a great sum of money was there, stood as one stricken with wonder, and rendered hearty thanks to God for sending them such welcome succour in their want and misery, and, turning to Adamantina, she begged pardon of her for the blows which she had so cruelly and unjustly given to her, and she took

the doll and caressed it tenderly and kissed it, holding it closely in her arms. And when the next day had come, the two sisters took of the money and purchased therewith bread and wine and oil and wood, and all other sorts of provisions which are suitable to a well-ordered house, taking care every evening to anoint the stomach of the doll with oil, and to wrap it in a piece of the finest linen, and the doll on its part never failed to supply them with money in abundance whenever they had need thereof.

It chanced on a certain day that one of their neighbours, having gone into the house of the two sisters, remarked that their home was well furnished with all the necessaries of life in great abundance, and on this account began to wonder how it was that they could have become rich in so short a time, remembering, moreover, how miserably poor they had been hitherto, and knowing full well that no one could say otherwise than that they were honest and upright in all their

ways. Wherefore the neighbour, having given the matter due consideration, determined to find out the source from which they might have gathered such gain; so having betaken herself once more to the house of the two sisters, she thus addressed them: ‘My daughters, I beg you to tell me by what means you have been able to furnish your house so plentifully, seeing that but yesterday you were in sore poverty.’ To this question Cassandra, the elder sister, made reply: ‘Good neighbour, we have done all this by the means of a single pound of flaxen yarn, which we gave in exchange for a doll, and this doll gives us money in abundance, and supplies us with everything we need.’ The neighbour, when she heard these words was greatly disturbed in her mind, and was so filled with envy of the good fortune which had befallen the girls that she determined to steal the doll. As soon as she returned to her house, she told her husband how the two sisters had a certain doll which

every night was accustomed to give them great store of gold and silver, and that she had made up her mind to steal the doll from them come what might.

Now although the husband made mock of his wife's words at first, she went on telling her story with such a show of reason that in the end she convinced him that it was nought but the truth. But he said to his wife: 'And how do you mean to steal it?' To this the good woman made answer: 'To-night you must feign to be drunk, and, having caught up your sword, you must run after me threatening to take my life, but at the same time only striking the wall. And I, pretending to be in great terror of you, will run out of the house into the street, and the two sisters, who are kindly and compassionate by nature, will assuredly open their door to me, and take me in and shelter me. I will stay there for the night, and will do the best I can for the futherance of my plan.'

And when the evening had come, the

husband of this good dame took a rusty old sword of his, and, laying about with it now against this wall and now against that, ran after his wife, who, screaming and crying with a loud voice, fled out of the house. The two sisters, when they heard this hurlyburly, ran to look out into the street to see what might be the cause thereof, whereupon they recognized the voice of their neighbour, who was screaming lustily. They at once rushed away from the window, and ran down to the door giving on to the street, and having opened this they pulled her into the house. The good woman, when she had been questioned by them for what reason her husband had pursued and assaulted her with such anger, thus made reply: 'This evening he came home so dazed with winebibbing that he wots not anything that he does. And only for the reason that I reprov'd him on account of his drunkenness, he seized his sword and ran after me threatening to kill me; but as I am more nimble and swift

of foot than he, I was only too ready to get out of his way, so as to keep him from working some scandalous deed, and here I am in your charge.' When they heard these words both the sisters said: 'You did well, my mother, and you must assuredly bide this night with us, lest you should fall into some fresh danger of your life, and in the meantime your husband's drunken humour will dissipate itself.' And when they had prepared the supper they all sat down together.

Adamantina, when she went to bed, anointed the doll according to her wont, and afterwards at the same hour of the night the doll cried out as before, and Adamantina, when she had attended to its wants, found that a large quantity of money had come from the doll in the same marvellous wise as before. The good woman who had sought refuge with the sisters was mightily astonished at what she saw, and every hour which must pass until she could steal the doll, and work this miracle for her own benefit, seemed a thousand years.

When the morning had come the good woman rose secretly from her bed, leaving the two sisters still sleeping, and stole the doll from Adamantina's side without letting the girl know aught of the theft. Then having aroused the girls she begged leave of them to return to her home, affirming that by this time her husband would doubtlessly have got rid of the fumes of the wine with which he had so inordinately filled himself. Therefore, when she had returned to her home, she said to her husband, with a joyful face: 'My husband, we have at last alighted upon our good fortune, for see, here is the doll I told you about, which can work such wonders.' And one hour seemed a thousand years till night should come, and she should be able to work the charm that would make her a rich woman. And when the night had fallen the woman took the doll, and, having lighted a good fire in her chamber, she anointed with oil the stomach and loins of the doll, and wrapped it carefully in child's clouts.

Then, having taken off her own clothes, she got into bed and placed it by her side.

After the first sleep of the night was over the doll woke up and cried out : ‘ The stool, madonna, the stool ! ’ (it did not call her mother, inasmuch as it did not know who she was), and the good woman, who was anxiously awaiting the result which was to follow, rose from her bed and attended to the doll as if it had been a young child ; but this time it happened that, in lieu of coins of gold and silver, the doll filled the chamber with so offensive a smell that the good woman was fain to get as far away from it as she could. The husband, when he perceived what had happened, said to her : ‘ See, fool that you are, what a pretty trick this doll has played you, and I myself am just as big a fool for having lent an ear to such crazy trash. ’ But the wife, waxing angry with her husband on account of these reproaches, affirmed with many an oath that she had seen with her own eyes.

the vast quantity of money that the doll had given to the two sisters. However, seeing that she was mightily anxious to make a fresh experiment on the following night, the husband, who was in no humour to face again the discomfort he had lately felt, began to abuse her roundly, and launched against her the most opprobrious speeches that ever man applied to woman. Not content with this, he seized the doll in his hand, and having opened the window, he hurled it out into the street, letting it fall upon a heap of sweepings which lay below. Soon after he had done this, it happened that some peasants who tilled the ground outside the city loaded on their cart this heap of refuse, and without knowing what they did loaded up the doll likewise, and when they had filled their cart they returned to the country, and spread the load of sweepings over their fields in order to enrich the soil.

Not many days after this, it chanced that Drusiano the king, who had gone

out into the country to seek diversion in the chase, was seized with a sharp pain of his intestines, and forthwith sought relief of the same by the remedy of nature, but not having upon him wherewith to accommodate himself afterwards, he called to him one of his servants and charged him to go search for something which might serve his ends. Whereupon the servant went towards the manure heap which the peasants aforesaid had collected, to see whether he might be able to find anything which would be suitable for the purpose, and, looking now on this side and now on that, his eye fell upon the doll, and having picked it up, he bore it at once to the king, who without any fear or suspicion, took hold of it and proceeded to apply it to the use for which he wanted it. But the next moment the king broke out into loud cries and bellowings of pain, for the doll had seized upon his hinder parts with its teeth, and held on thereto with so tight a grip that he screamed out with

agony at the top of his voice. And when those of his train heard these terrible cries, they forthwith all ran towards the king to lend him their aid. Seeing him lying on the ground more dead than alive, they were hugely astonished to find that he was suffering pain on account of the doll which had fastened on to him, and they began at once with their united strength to try to disengage it from his hinder parts; but all their strivings were in vain, for the more violently they tugged to get the thing away, the greater torment it inflicted on the poor king, and there was not one of them who could disturb its hold, much less make it let go. And now and again the doll would claw him with its sharp fingers so grievously that he seemed to see all the stars of the firmament, although it was yet high noon.

When the unfortunate king had returned to his palace with the doll still hanging on to him, and was still unable to find any means of getting rid of his

plague, he caused to be put forth a proclamation declaring that any man, no matter what his condition might be, who should have the wit and courage to remove the doll should be rewarded by a gift of one third part of the king's dominions, and if it should chance that any maiden might be found able to perform this work he would take her for his beloved wife. And in addition to this King Drusiano swore by his crown, and bound himself by the most solemn oaths to keep every promise he had made in the proclamation above named. As soon as the king's proclamation was made public, a vast crowd of people repaired to the palace in the hope of obtaining the promised reward, but to not one of them was granted the good fortune of being able to rid the king of his trouble; on the contrary, as soon as any one chanced to come near the king the doll tormented him more grievously than ever, so the wretched Drusiano, thus cruelly vexed and tortured, and unable

to light upon any remedy for his strange and incomprehensible affliction, lay there almost as if he were a dead man.

Cassandra and Adamantina, who in the meantime had shed many tears over the loss of their doll, as soon as they heard the terms of the proclamation which had been issued, went straightway to the palace and presented themselves before the king. Then Cassandra, who was the elder of the two, began at once to fondle and caress the doll with signs of the greatest affection, but thereupon, so far from loosening its hold, it only vexed the poor king yet more sorely with its teeth and claws. Then Adamantina, who stood somewhat apart from the others, now came forward and said: ‘Gracious king! I beg you that you will now suffer me to try my fortune in ridding you of this ill,’ and, having gone close to the doll, she spake thus: ‘Ah, my child! leave my lord the king in peace now, and do not torment him any longer.’ And with these words she took hold of

it by its clothes, and began to fondle and caress it. The doll, as soon as it recognized its own little mother, who had been in the habit of tending and caring for it, at once let go its hold on the king's person and sprang into Adamantina's arms. And when Drusiano perceived what was done, he was utterly astonished and amazed, and forthwith lay down to get some repose, for during many and many nights and days he had not been able to find either rest or peace on account of the sharp agony he had undergone.

When King Drusiano was at length healed of the ills that had befallen him on account of the biting of the doll, in order that he might not fail in the fulfilment of the promise he had made, he caused Adamantina to be brought into his presence, and, seeing that she was a fair and graceful young maiden, he married her in the presence of all his people. A short time afterwards he honourably bestowed her elder sister Cassandra in marriage with sumptuous feast-

ings and triumphs, and they all lived long together in peace and happiness.

The doll, when it saw how both of the sisters had been so honourably and richly married, and how everything had come to a happy issue, suddenly disappeared, and whither it went and what became of it no man ever knew. But in my opinion it merely disappeared after the common fashion of phantoms.

The fable told by Alteria, which here came to an end, gave great pleasure to all the company, and the laughter was loud and long as they recalled to mind the beneficent ways and habits of the doll, and in what fashion the thing hung with its teeth and its claws upon the hinder parts of the king. And when the laughter had somewhat abated, the Signora at once gave the word to Alteria to follow the customary rule and propound her enigma, which the damsel gave in the following words, smiling pleasantly the while :

Just a span in length is he,
And plump in form in due degree.

Full of eagerness and pride,
And ready aye with men to bide.
Very fair his seeming shows ;
Capote red he wears and hose ;
Bells also. A thing of pleasure
To those who love him in due measure.

As soon as Alteria had spoken the last word of her gracefully turned and difficult enigma, the Signora, who by this time had put off her kindly mood and was casting angry looks upon the damsel, cried out that it was most unseemly to speak such immodest words to the ears of honest women in her presence, and that for the future she must be careful not to trespass in like manner. Whereupon Alteria, blushing somewhat, rose from her seat, and having turned her bright face towards the Signora, spake thus : “ Signora, of a truth the enigma which I have just proposed is not in any way immodest as you seem to believe, and this I shall make quite clear to you by giving you the real interpretation thereof, which I will straightway make

known to you and to the rest of my gracious hearers. For be it understood my enigma signifies nothing else except the falcon, which is a bird at once tractable and bold, and comes readily to the falconer's call. It wears on its feet jesses and bells, and it will give great pleasure and diversion to anyone who goes out fowling therewith." When the real interpretation of this clever riddle, which had been set down by the Signora as being unseemly, had been given, all the listeners praised it heartily, and the Signora, having by this time laid aside every sinister imaginings she had harboured concerning Alteria's riddle, turned her face towards Laretta and made a sign to her that she should approach her, and the damsel at once came in obedience to the command. And because Laretta stood next in turn to follow with her fable, the Signora thus addressed her: "It is my wish that you refrain for a while from telling us your story, and that you should instead listen to that which the others

may say. It is not because I hold you in light esteem that I speak thus to you, or rate your powers less than those of your companions, but in order that we may be entertained this evening in a fashion that is beyond our wont." To this Laretta made reply : " Signora, any word of yours is to me as a command," and having made a profound obeisance to the Signora she went back to her place.

Then the Signora, turning an earnest gaze upon Molino's face, made a sign to him thus with her hand to bid him come to her, whereupon he got up quickly from his seat and went most respectfully towards her. To him she spake in these words : " Signor Antonio, this last evening of the week is for us a special time, a season of privilege for anyone to say whatsoever he may wish to say, so for my own pleasure and for the pleasure of this honourable company, I would that you yourself should relate to us a fable in your best and happiest vein and man-

ner, and I further beg you that you will tell us this story in the speech of Bergamo. And if—as I hope you will—you grant us this favour, we shall all of us be held by a lasting obligation to you.” Molino, when he rightly understood the Signora’s speech, stood at first as one confounded, but when he realized that he had sailed up to a point he could not weather, he said: “Signora, it is for you to command and for us to obey, but I would warn you not to expect from me aught that shall give you any great pleasure, seeing that the illustrious damsels I see around me have brought the art of story-telling to such a high pitch of excellence that there is little or no chance for one like me to contribute aught to our diversion. Nevertheless, such as I am, I will do my best to give you satisfaction, not, indeed, so great as you wish, or as I would, but according to the measure of my humble powers.” And having thus spoken, Molino went back to his seat and began his story in the following words.

THE THIRD FABLE.

Bertholdo of Valsabbia has three sons, all of them hunchbacks and much alike in seeming. One of them, called Zambo, goes out into the world to seek his fortune, and arrives at Rome, where he is killed and thrown into the Tiber, together with his two brothers.¹



T is indeed hard, sweet ladies and gracious Signora ! hard, indeed, I say it is, to kick against the pricks, for the kick of an ass is a cruel thing ; but still more cruel is the kick of a horse, and for this reason, since fortune has willed it that I should undertake to tell a tale, I had best obey ; for patience beatifies us, but obstinacy damns us, and, should we prove obstinate, we go straight to the devil. So if it should chance that I tell you something which may prove in no wise to your taste, do not give the blame to me, but to the Signora over yonder who has thus willed it.

¹ Told in the dialect of Bergamo.

It often happens that a man goes a-seeking that which he had better leave alone, and in consequence not seldom lights upon certain things which he never looked to find, and in the end will be left with his hand full of flies.¹ Thus, indeed, it happened some time ago to Zambo, the son of Bertholdo of Valsabbia, who sought to dupe two of his brothers, but by his brothers was himself duped.

True it is that in the end they all three died miserably, as you will hear if you will lend me your ears, and with your minds and your understandings listen to the story which I am now about to relate.

I must tell you, therefore, that Bertholdo of Valsabbia, in the province of Bergamo, had three sons, all three hunchbacks, and all resembling each other so closely that it was impossible to tell the one from the other; they might, indeed, have been likened to three shrivelled

¹ Orig., *e ixi romà co li ma pieni de moschi.*

pumpkins.¹ One of these sons was called Zambo, another Bertaz, and the third Santì; and Zambo, who was the eldest, had not yet attained his sixteenth year. It came one day to Zambo's ears that Bertholdo his father, by reason of the great dearth there was in the parts round about and in all the rest of the land besides, wished to sell for the sake of his family the small property which was his patrimony (in sooth, there were few or none to be found in that country who had any belongings of their own); wherefore Zambo, addressing himself to Bertaz and Santì, his younger brothers, spoke to them as an elder brother in the following words: 'It would surely be a wiser plan, my dear brothers, that our father should retain the little bit of property which we happen to have, so that after his death we may have something whereby to gain a sustenance, and that you should go out into the world and try to earn something upon which we may keep

¹ Orig., *con sarevef à di tre penduletti sgonfi de dre.*

up our house. I, in the meantime, will remain at home with the old man, taking good care of him, and thus we shall have no need to waste our substance, and by such management may be able to tide over the season of scarcity.'

Bertaz and Santì the younger brothers, who were no less crafty and cunning than Zambo, at once made answer to their brother: 'Zambo, dear brother that you are, you spring a surprise upon us somewhat suddenly, and question us in such wise that we scarcely know how to answer you. Give us thinking time for this one night; then we will consider the matter, and to-morrow will let you have our reply.'

The two brothers, Bertaz and Santì, had been brought forth at one birth, and between these two there was a greater sympathy than between either of them and Zambo. And if Zambo were to be reckoned a rascal of twenty-two carats, Bertaz and Santì were rascals of twenty-six; for it not seldom happens that,

where nature fails, ingenuity and malice supply the want.

When the following morning had come, Bertaz, by agreement with Santì his brother, went to find Zambo, and opened discourse with him in these words: 'Zambo, my dear brother, we have well thought over and considered the case in which we stand, and, seeing that you are (as you will not deny) the elder brother, we think it would be more seemly for you to go first into the world, and that we who are younger should stop here to look after our father. And we would counsel you that if, in the meantime, you should come across any good fortune for yourself and for us, you should write to us here, and we would come at once to join you.' Zambo, who had hoped to get the better of Bertaz and Santì, was greatly disconcerted when he heard this answer, and, muttering to himself, he said: 'These two are more cunning and malicious loons than I had imagined.' For he had hoped to be rid

of his two brothers, and himself be left master of all their property, trusting that they might both of them die of hunger by reason of the dearth prevailing in the land ; moreover, their father was not long for this world, and had already one foot in the grave. But the issue of this affair proved to be vastly different than anything Zambo had expected. When, therefore, Zambo heard the answer given to him by Bertaz and Santì, he made a small bundle of the few rags he possessed, and, having filled a pouch with some bread and cheese and a small flask of wine, he put on his feet a pair of shoes of red pigskin, and departed thence and went towards Brescia. But not finding anything to suit him there, he went on to Verona, where he came across a master cap-maker, who asked him whether he knew how to make caps, to which question he answered no ; and, seeing that there was nothing for him to do there, he left Verona, and, having passed through Vicenza, he came to Padua,

where certain doctors saw him and asked him whether he knew how to take care of mules, and he answered them no, but that he could till the land and tend vines; but, as he could not come to any understanding with them, he went on his way to Venice.

Zambo had wandered about the city for a long time without lighting on any employ to his taste, and, seeing that he had about him neither a coin, nor anything to eat, he felt that he was indeed in evil case. But after he had walked a long distance, he was brought by God's pleasure to the port, but because he was penniless no one would assist him. Wherefore the poor fellow knew not which way he should turn, but having remarked that the ragged wastrels who turned the machines for drawing boats ashore gained a few pence by this labour, he took up this calling himself. But Fortune, who always persecutes the poor, the slothful, and the wretched, willed that one day when he was working one of

these machines the leather strap should break. This in untwining caught a spar, which hit him in the chest and felled him to the ground, where for a time he lay as one lifeless. Indeed, had it not been for the timely aid given to him by some kind-hearted fellows, who haled him into their boat by his legs and arms and rowed him back to Venice, he assuredly would have died.

When Zambo had recovered from the ill effects of this mischance he went in search of someone who might give him employment, and as he passed by a grocer's shop he was remarked by the master thereof, who was pounding in a mortar almonds wherewith to make marzapan. Whereupon the grocer asked him whether he was minded to come and serve in the shop, and Zambo replied that he was; so, having entered, he was at once set to work by the grocer at dressing certain comfits, and instructed how to separate the black from the white, working the while beside an-

other apprentice. This fellow and Zambo (greedy gluttons, forsooth), in the course of their task of comfit dressing, set to work in such a manner that they stripped off and used the outer rind of the sweet almonds and ate the kernels themselves. The grocer, when he saw what was going on, took a stick in his hand and gave each of them a sound beating, saying ; ‘ If you are set on plunder, you thievish knaves, I would that you pilfered your own stores and not mine,’ and having thus spoken he belaboured them still more and bade them go to the devil.

Zambo, smarting from the blows dealt him by the grocer, took his departure and went to St. Mark’s Place, and as he passed by the spot where herbs and vegetables are set out for sale, he met by good luck a herbalist from Chiozza, Vivia Vianel by name, who straightway demanded of him whether he would be willing to enter his service, where he would get good food and good treat-

ment as well. Zambo, who at this time wore the armorial bearings of Siena¹ on his back, and was longing for a good meal, replied that he was ; so, when Vianel had sold his few last bunches of herbs, they took a boat and returned to Chiozza, where Zambo was at once set to work in the garden and bidden to tend the vines.

Now Zambo, after he had gone up and down in Chiozza for a certain time, became acquainted with divers of his master's friends, and when the season for the first ripe figs had come, Vivia took the three finest he could pluck from his garden, and, having put them on a platter, sent them as a present to a friend of his in Chiozza whose name was Peder. He called Zambo and gave him the three figs, and said to him : 'Zambo, take these three figs and carry them to my friend Ser Peder, and ask him to accept them for love of me.' Zambo in obedience to Vivia's command replied :

¹ *i.e.*, a famished wolf.

‘With pleasure, my master,’ and taking the figs he merrily went his way. But it chanced by ill luck that as Zambo was going along the street a greedy humour took possession of him, and having looked at the figs over and over again he thus addressed gluttony: ‘What shall I do? shall I eat or shall I refrain?’ To this gluttony replied: ‘A starving man observes no law; wherefore eat.’ And for the reason that Zambo was greedy by nature and very hungry to boot, he listened to these counsels of gluttony, and having taken in his hands one of the figs, he began to rend the skin from the neck thereof. Then he took a bite here and a bite there, saying the while, ‘It is good; it is not good;’ and so he went on till he had consumed it all in tasting, and nought but the skin remained.

When Zambo had eaten the fig he began to wonder whether, perchance, he might not have transgressed somewhat, but for the reason that gluttony still

urged him on, he did not stand long in balancing chances, but took the second fig in his hand and treated it as he had treated the first. After the greedy fellow had made an end of the second fig he was again assailed by fears, and hardly knew whether, on account of his fault, he should go on or turn back; but after a short term of indecision he took courage and determined to go on. As soon as he had come to Ser Peder's door he knocked thereat, and as he was well known there the door was quickly opened. Having entered he went to find Ser Peder, who was walking up and down, and when he saw him the good man thus addressed him: 'What has Zambo come to tell me? What good news does he bring?' 'Good morrow, good morrow,' answered Zambo; 'my master gave me three figs to bring to you, but of these three I have eaten two.' 'But how could you do such a thing as this?' said Ser Peder. 'I did it in this fashion,' said Zambo, and with

these words he took the last fig and ate it deliberately, and so it fell out that all three of the figs found their way into Zambo's belly. When Ser Peder saw this saucy jest he said to Zambo: 'My son, tell your master that I thank him, but that in future he need not trouble himself to send me presents of this sort.' Zambo answered, 'No, no, Messer Peder, say not so, for I shall never weary of such errands,' and with these words he left Messer Peder and went home.

When the report of Zambo's smart trick came to Vivian's ears, and when he learned furthermore how finely lazy he was and a glutton as well, guzzling when he was hungry till he was ready to burst, and how he would never work save when he was driven thereto, the good man chased the hunchback out of his house. So Zambo, poor devil, when he found himself driven out of his employ, knew not whither to turn; thus after a little he determined to go to Rome in the

hope that he might there find better fortune than he had hitherto come across, and this plan of his he duly carried out.

Zambo, when he had arrived in Rome, went about seeking here and there a master, and at last met a certain merchant who was called Messer Ambros dal Mul, who kept a great shop full of cloth goods. With him Zambo took service, and was set to mind the shop, and seeing that he had suffered much in the past, he made up his mind to learn the trade and to live a decent life for the future. Though he was deformed and ugly, he was nevertheless very shrewd, and in a short time he made himself so useful in the shop that his master seemed to take no more trouble himself about buying or selling, but trusted everything to him and made use of him for service of all kinds. Now it chanced that one day Messer Ambros had occasion to go to the fair of Recanati with a stock of cloth, but perceiving that Zambo had made himself so competent in the busi-

ness and had proved himself worthy of trust, he determined to send Zambo to the fair, and bide at home himself and mind his shop.

After Zambo's departure it happened by ill fortune that Messer Ambros was seized with so grave and insidious an illness that after the lapse of a few days he died. When his wife, who was called Madonna Felicetta, found that she was a widow, she wellnigh died herself, of grief¹ for the loss of her husband, and of anxiety on account of the breaking up of her business. As soon as Zambo heard of the sad news of his master's death, he returned straightway and bore himself as a godly youth should, and diligently went about the affairs of the shop. Madonna Felicetta, as time went on, remarked that Zambo behaved himself well and uprightly, and was diligent over the business. She considered, likewise, that a year had now rolled away since the death of Messer Ambros her hus-

¹ Orig., *anch ella no tira le calzi*.

band, and, as she feared to lose Zambo some day together with divers of the customers of her shop, she took counsel with some of her gossips whether she should marry or not, and in case she should resolve to marry, whether it would be well for her to take for a husband Zambo the factor of her business, who had been for a long time in the service of her first husband, and had gathered much experience in the conduct of her affairs. These worthy gossips deeming her proposition a wise one, counselled her to marry Zambo; and between the word and the deed but little time¹ intervened, for the nuptials were celebrated at once, and Madonna Felicetta became the wife of Ser Zambo and Ser Zambo the husband of Madonna Felicetta.

When Ser Zambo perceived himself raised to this high estate, how he had a wife of his own and a fine shop well stocked with all manner of cloth goods, he wrote to his father, telling him he

¹ Orig., *e dal dichg al fahg se fe le nozzi.*

was now in Rome, and of the great stroke of luck which had befallen him. The father, who since the day of Zambo's departure had heard no tidings of his son, nor had ever received a written word from him, now gave up the ghost from sheer joy, but Bertaz and Santì were mightily pleased and consoled with the news.

One day it chanced that Madonna Felicetta found herself in need of a new pair of stockings, because the ones she wore were rent and torn, wherefore she said to Ser Zambo her husband that he must have made for her another pair. To this Zambo replied that he had other business to do, and that if her stockings were torn, she had better go and mend them and patch them and put new heels thereto. Madonna Felicetta, who had been greatly pampered by her late husband, replied that it had never been her wont to go shod in hose which had been mended and heeled, and that she must have a new pair. Then answered Ser Zambo that in his country customs were

different, and that she must do without. Thus the bout of wrangling began, and, flying from one angry word to another, it came to pass in the end that Ser Zambo lifted his hand and cuffed her over the head so heavily that she fell to the ground.¹ Madonna Felicetta, planning the while how she might give back these blows of Ser Zambo, was little disposed to come to terms with him or to pacify him in any way, so she began to hurl foul words at him. Ser Zambo, feeling that his honour was impugned thereby, belaboured her so soundly with his fists that the poor woman was constrained to hold her peace.

When the summer had passed, and the cold weather had set in, Madonna Felicetta asked Ser Zambo to let her have a silken lining wherewith to repair her pelisse, which was in very bad condition, and in order that he might be assured that she spoke the truth she

¹ Orig., *una mostazzada si fatta in sol mostaz, che la fe andà d'inturem.*

brought it to him to see ; but Ser Zambo did not trouble to cast his eye over it, but simply said that she must mend it and wear it as it was, for that in his country people were not used to so much pomp. Madonna Felicetta, when she heard these words, was mightily wroth, and affirmed that she must have granted to her what she asked at any cost. Ser Zambo, however, answered that she must hold her peace and be careful not to arouse his anger, otherwise it would be the worse for her. But Madonna Felicetta went on insisting that she must have it, and they one and the other worked themselves up into such a fury that they were well nigh blinded with rage. Whereupon Ser Zambo, according to his wont, began to thump her with his stick, and gave her as shrewd a jacketting of blows as she could bear, and she lay half dead.¹ When Madonna Felicetta saw how hugely Zambo's humour towards

¹ Orig., *e fag una pellizza de tanti bastonadi, quanti la ne pos mai portà, e la lassà quasi per morta.*

her had changed, she began to blaspheme and to curse the day and the hour when she had first spoken to him, nor did she forget those who had advised her to take him for a husband. ‘Is this the way you treat me,’ she cried, ‘you poltroon, you ungrateful rascal, hangman, Goth, and villainous scoundrel? Is this the reward you return to me for the many benefits you have received? for, from the base hireling you formerly were, have I not made you the master not only of my wealth but of my person as well? And yet you deal with me in this wise. Hold your peace, traitor, for I will make you pay smartly for this.’ Ser Zambo, hearing how his wife waxed more and more wroth, and poured out her abuse of him more copiously than ever, made farther shrewd play upon her back with his cudgel to give her a finishing touch, whereupon Madonna Felicetta was reduced to such a state of fear, that when she heard the sound of Zambo’s voice or footstep, she trem-

bled like a leaf in the wind, and became all wet with terror.

When the winter had passed and the summer was coming on, it chanced that Ser Zambo had need to go to Bologna on account of business, and to collect certain sums of money due to him. As this journey would occupy some days, he said to Madonna Felicetta: 'Wife, I would have you know that I have two brothers, who are both hunchbacks as I am myself, and so closely do we all resemble one another that if anyone should see us all three together he would never know which was which. Now I bid you watch well lest they come here and attempt to lodge with us. See that you do not let them come over the threshold on any account, for they are wicked, deceitful, and crafty knaves, and would assuredly play you some evil trick. Then they would go to the devil and leave you with your hands full of flies.¹ If I should learn that you have harboured them in this house I will

¹ Orig., *che ti romagnis con le ma pieni de moschi.*

make you the most wretched woman in the world.' And having said these words he departed.

A few days after Zambo's departure the brothers Bertaz and Santì arrived, and went about asking for Ser Zambo's shop, which was pointed out to them. When the two rascals saw the fine shop, furnished richly with all manner of cloth goods, they were astounded, and marvelled amain how it was that he could have gathered together all this wealth in so short a time. And, lost in wonderment, they went to the shop and said they desired to have speech with Ser Zambo, but were told that he was gone into the country; if however, they had need of aught they could ask for it. Whereupon Bertaz said they much wished to speak with him, but as he was not at home they would speak with his wife, so they bade the servant call Madonna Felicetta, and when she came into the shop she knew at once that the men before her were her brothers-in-law. Bertaz, when he

saw her, straightway inquired of her, 'Madonna, are you the wife of Zambo?' And she made answer that she was. Then said Bertaz: 'Madonna, shake hands, for we are the brothers of your husband, and therefore your brothers-in-law.' Madonna Felicetta, who well remembered the words of Ser Zambo as well as the belabouring he had given her, refused to touch their hands, but they went on plying her with so many affectionate words and gestures that in the end she shook hands with them. As soon as she had thus greeted them, Bertaz cried out: 'Oh, my dear sister-in-law! give us somewhat to eat, for we are half famished.' But this she refused to do. The rogues, however, knew so well how to use the trick of flattery, and begged so persistently, that Madonna Felicetta was moved to pity, and took them into the house and gave them food and drink in plenty, and even allowed them to sleep in a certain corner. Scarcely had three days passed since Bertaz and Santì had come

to Madonna Felicetta's house when Ser Zambo returned. His wife, as soon as she heard of this, was almost beside herself with terror, and she hardly knew what to do so as to keep the brothers out of Ser Zambo's sight, and as she could hit upon no better plan she made them go into the kitchen, where was a trough in which they were accustomed to scald pigs, and in this she bade them conceal themselves.

When Ser Zambo entered the house and marked how dishevelled and worried his wife seemed to be, he was mightily upset in his mind and said: 'Why do you look so frightened? What ails you? I suppose there is no gallant hidden anywhere in the house?' But she replied in a faint voice that there was nought the matter with her. Ser Zambo, who was regarding her sharply the while, said: 'Certes, there is something the matter with you. Are those brothers of mine by any chance in the house?' But she answered boldly that they were not;

whereupon he began to give her a taste of the stick, according to his custom. Bertaz and Santì, who were under the pig-trough, could hear all the hurlyburly, and, so terrified were they, that they wet their breeches like children in a fright and did not venture to move. Ser Zambo, when he at last put down his stick, began to search the house in every corner to see whether he could find anyone hidden, but finding nought he calmed himself somewhat and went about the ordering of certain of his affairs, and so long was he occupied thereanent (thus keeping his luckless brothers in their hiding-place) that Bertaz and Santì, either through fear, or through the great heat, or on account of the foul stench of the pig-trough, straightway gave up the ghost.

When the hour had come at which Ser Zambo was wont to repair to the piazza, there to transact business with the other merchants, he went out of the house, and as soon as he had taken his

departure Madonna Felicetta went to the pig-trough to devise some scheme for getting rid of her brothers-in-law, so that Ser Zambo might have no suspicion that she had given them shelter. But when she uncovered the trough she found them lying there both stark dead, and looking exactly like two pigs. The poor woman, when she saw what had happened, fell into a terrible taking of grief and despair, and, in order that her husband might be kept altogether in ignorance of what had occurred, she spent all her force in trying to throw them out of the house, so that the mishap might be hidden from Ser Zambo, and from all the rest of the city as well.

I have heard people say that in Rome there is a certain custom according to which, should the dead body of any stranger or pilgrim be found in the public streets or in any man's house, it is straightway taken up by certain scavengers¹ appointed for this purpose and car-

¹ Orig., *picegamort*.

ried by them outside the walls of the city and then cast into the Tiber, so that of such unfortunates nothing more is ever heard or seen. Now Madonna Felicetta, having gone to look out of the window to see whether by chance any friends of hers might be passing by who would lend aid in getting rid of the two dead bodies, by good luck espied one of these corpse-bearers, and called to him to come in, telling him that she had a corpse in the house, and that she wanted him to take it away at once and cast it into the Tiber, according to the custom of the place. Already Madonna Felicetta had pulled out one of the corpses from under the cover of the trough, and had left it lying on the floor near thereto ; so, when the corpse-bearer had come upstairs, she helped him to load the dead body on his shoulders, and bade him come back to the house after he had thrown it into the river, when she would pay him for his services. Whereupon the corpse-bearer went outside the city wall and

threw the body into the Tiber, and, having done his work, he returned to Madonna Felicetta and asked her to give him a florin, which was the customary guerdon. But while the corpse-bearer was engaged in carrying off the first body, Madonna Felicetta, who was a crafty dame, drew out from the trough the other body and disposed it at the foot of the trough in exactly the same place where the first had lain, and when the corpse-bearer came back to Madonna Felicetta for his payment, she said to him: ‘Did you indeed carry the corpse I gave you to the Tiber?’ And to this the fellow replied, ‘I did, madonna.’ ‘Did you throw it into the river?’ said the dame; and he answered: ‘Did I throw it in? indeed I did, and in my best manner.’ At this speech Madonna Felicetta said: ‘How could you have thrown it in, as you say you have? Just look and see whether it be not still here.’ And when the corpse-bearer saw the second dead body, he really thought

it must be the one he had carried away, and was covered with dismay and confusion ; and, cursing and swearing the while, he hoisted it upon his shoulders, and, having carried it off, he cast it into the Tiber, and stood for awhile to watch it as it floated down the stream.¹ And whilst he was once more returning to Madonna Felicetta's house to receive his payment, it chanced that he met Ser Zambo, who was on his way home, and when the corpse-bearer espied the man who bore so strong a likeness to the two other hunchbacks whom he had carried to the Tiber, he flew into such a violent fit of rage that he seemed, as it were, to spit forth fire and flames on all sides and gave a free rein to his passion. For in truth he deemed the fellow before him to be no other than the one whom he had already twice cast into the river, and that he must be some evil spirit who was returning to his own place ; so he stole softly behind Ser Zambo and dealt him a griev-

¹ Orig., *anda a seconda*.

ous blow on the head with an iron winch which he carried in his hand, saying: 'Ah! you cowardly, villainous loon, do you think that I want to spend the rest of my days in haling you to the river?' and as he thus railed he mishandled him so violently that poor Zambo, on account of the cudgelling he got, was soon a dead man and went to talk to Pilate.¹

When the corpse-bearer had got upon his shoulders the third corpse, which was still warm, he bore it away and threw it into the Tiber after the two others, and thus Zambo and Bertaz and Santì miserably ended their lives. Madonna Felicetta, when she heard the news of this, was greatly delighted thereat, and felt no small content that she was freed from all her hardships and might again enjoy her former liberty.

Molino's fable here came to an end. It had pleased the ladies so mightily that they could not forbear from laughing thereat and talking it over. And

¹ Orig., *se n'anda a parla a Pilat.*

although the Signora more than once bade them be silent, she found it no easy matter to put an end to their merry laughter. At last, in order to bring the company once more into a sedater mood, she commanded Molino to set them to guess an enigma in the same dialect, and he, ever ready to obey her, gave his riddle in the following words:

Out of their prison grave so dark
Arise the bones of dead men stark,
And 'twixt the hours of tierce and sext,
By signs will tell to mortals vext
What chance's smiles or frowns of fate
May bless or ban till time grows late.
Savage and deep the misers curse,
Making the signs of chance averse;
But he, untouched by lust of gold,
Unmoved will fortune's freaks behold.
Next one with beard of flesh upsprings,
And beak of bone, and warning sings
To bid the watchers bury deep
Their bodies in a downy sleep,
And lie, poor fools by care unstirred,
On welcome boon of foolish bird.

Though Molino's fable forsooth

pleased the company much, this ingenious but somewhat gruesome enigma diverted them yet more; but forasmuch as no one had gathered any inkling of its meaning, the ladies with one voice begged him earnestly that he should give the solution thereof in the same dialect he had used in his narration. Molino, when he perceived that this was the general wish of the company, in order that he might not appear to be niggard of his gifts, solved the enigma in the following terms: "My enigma, dear ladies, signifies the game of hazard, and the bones of the dead which leave their graves are the dice which fall out of the dice-box, and when they mark tray, deuce, and ace, these are the points which show good luck, and will not such points as these put spirit into the play and money into the purse of the man who often wins the throw thereby? Does the loser ever like to go away a loser, and does not all this come by the change and variations of fortune? The avaricious player who

always seeks to win will now and again curse and swear so fiercely that I cannot think why the earth does not open and swallow him up. And, at such times as the game goes on all through the night, the cock, who has a beard of flesh and a beak of bone, will get up and crow ‘Cock-a-doodle-do,’ thus letting the gamesters know that it is past midnight and they ought to repair to their beds of goose down. When they lie in these is it not like sinking into a deep grave? Are you all content with this my explanation?”


The explanation of this subtle enigma was received by the whole company with great laughter; so hearty was it in sooth that they could scarce forbear from rolling about on their seats. And after the Signora had commanded everyone to keep silent, she turned towards Molino and said: “Signor Antonio, as the fair orb of Dian outshines all other stars, so the fable just told to us by you, together with your enigma, bears off the palm

from all others which we have hitherto heard." Molino answered: "The praise you give me, Signora, cannot surely be due on account of my skill; it comes rather from the great courtesy which always abides in you. But if it should happen that the Trevisan were willing to tell you a story in the dialect of his country, I am sure you would listen to this with still greater pleasure." The Signora, who desired greatly to hear a story told in this fashion, said: "Signor Benedetto, do you hear what our Molino says? Certainly you would do him a great wrong were you to make false these words of his. Put, therefore, your hand in your pouch and draw therefrom some peasant story to enliven us all." The Trevisan, to whom it appeared unseemly that he should occupy the place of Arianna, whose turn came next, at first excused himself, but seeing that he could not weather¹ this point, began his fable in the following words.

¹ Orig., *schiffare tal scoglio*.

THE FOURTH FABLE.

Marsilio Vercelese, being enamoured of Thia, the wife of Cechato Rabboso, is taken by her into her house during her husband's absence. He having come back unexpected, is cozened by Thia, who feigns to work a spell, during which Marsilio silently takes to flight.¹

N good sooth, what more would you have, my lady mistress and fair damsels all? Has not Messer Antonio acquitted himself well? Has he not told you an excellent story? But, by the blood of a dog, I will do my best to match him, and to gather the best credit I may.

We villagers have always heard tell, that amongst gentlemen of the world, one man will manage his affairs in this way, and another in that. But I, who am an ignorant loon, and who know nothing of letters, tell you what I have always heard said by our elders, namely, that he who dances badly raises the loud-

¹ Told in the dialect of Treviso.

est laugh ;¹ so if you will have patience, I will do my best to amuse you. But do not think that I say these words because I wish to escape the trouble of telling you a tale, for I am not in the least fearful on this score. And, over and beyond this, I would have you understand that the story which Messer Antonio has told you, with so good a grace that it would be hard to beat, has fired me with so much courage that now, when I see I am indeed launched on my task, it seems to me a thousand years until I shall be able to begin. Perhaps indeed this fable of mine will be no less pleasing and laughable than Messer Antonio's, especially as I purpose to tell you of the ingenuity of a peasant woman who played a trick upon her fool of a husband ; wherefore, if you will listen to me and give me your kind attention, I will tell it to you as well as I can.

Above the domain of Piove de Sacco, which is, as I need hardly tell you, a

¹ Orig., *chi mal balla, ben solazza*.

territory of Padua, seeing that this must be well known to all of you, is situated a village called Salmazza; wherein there lived, a very long time since, a peasant called Cechato Rabboso, who, although he was a fellow with a big head and body, was nevertheless a poor fool and over-trustful of his own powers. This Cechato Rabboso had to wife the daughter of a farmer called Gagiardi, who lived in a village called Campelongo, and she was a wily, crafty, and mischievous young woman, called by the name of Thia. Besides being so shrewd, she was in her person a stout wench and handsome of face, so that it was commonly said there was not another peasant woman for miles round who could be compared with her. And because she was so sprightly and nimble at country dances, the young gallants who saw her would not seldom lose their hearts to her straightway. Now it happened that a certain young man, who was himself handsome and of a sturdy figure, a prosperous citizen of

Padua, by name Marsilio Vercelese, became enamoured of this Thia, and so ardently was he consumed by the flame of his love that whenever she went to a village dance this youth would be sure to follow her thither, and for the greater part of the time he would dance with her, devoting himself entirely to her and never dancing with any other woman. But although this young gallant was so fiercely enamoured of her, he kept his love a secret as well as he could, so as not to let it be known to anybody, nor to become a matter of common gossip to all the neighbours round about.

Marsilio, knowing quite well that Cechato, Thia's husband, was a poor man, supporting his house by the work of his hands, and from the early morning till late at night labouring hard, now at this, now at that work, began to prowl about Thia's house, and, by constantly plying her with soft glances, he soon found an opportunity of addressing her. Now, although Marsilio had determined

in his mind to disclose the love which he bore her, still he doubted whether she might not be angered and refuse to see him again in case he should declare his passion, for it did not seem to him that she looked upon him so kindly as he deserved, seeing how great was the love he had for her. And, besides this, he was afraid of being discovered by some malicious person who would caution Cechato her husband, who on this account might very likely do him some evil turn ; for Cechato, although he was such a numskull, was sharp enough to be jealous.

Marsilio, therefore, spent his days in assiduously haunting the house where Thia lived, and he would gaze at her so long and so intently that at last she could not fail to be aware that he was enamoured of her. But, for certain reasons best known to herself, she forbore to look favourably upon him, or show that she was in any way inclined to return his passion, and although she was

in her secret mind quite willing to meet his wishes, she feigned to be indifferent to him, and turned her back upon him.

One day it chanced that Thia was sitting all alone on a wooden bench placed near the outer door of the house, and holding under her arm the distaff on which some flax was wound — she was, indeed, busy doing some spinning for her landlady — when Marsilio, who had taken a little heart of grace, came forward and said to her : ‘ God be with you, my friend Thia ! ’ And Thia answered : ‘ Welcome, young gentleman ! ’ ‘ How is it that you do not know,’ said Marsilio, ‘ that I am consumed of love for you, and am like to die, and you on your part make no account of it, and care not in the least about my cruel sufferings ? ’ To this Thia answered : ‘ How should I know whether you love me or not ? ’ Said Marsilio : ‘ If you never knew it before, I will now let you know that such is my case, for I am consumed with all the grief and passion

that a man can feel.' And Thia answered him: 'Well, of a surety you have let me know it now.' Then Marsilio said, 'And you? Ah, tell me the truth, by the faith you have! Do you love me too?' Thia, with a smile answered, 'Perhaps I love you a little.' Then said Marsilio, 'Heaven help you, tell me how much?' 'I love you very much,' answered Thia. Then Marsilio cried, 'Alas, Thia! if you really loved me as much as you say, you would show it to me by some sign, but I cannot believe that you love me at all.' Thia answered, 'Well, and what sign would you have me give you?' 'Oh, Thia!' said Marsilio, 'you know very well what is in my mind without my telling you.' 'No, I cannot possibly know it unless you tell me,' said Thia. Then Marsilio replied, 'I will tell you if you will listen to me, and not be angered.' Thia then answered, 'Say on, sir, for I promise you on my soul that, if it is a good thing and not against my honour, I will not

be angered with you.' Then Marsilio said, 'Then, my love, when will you give me the chance of holding you in my arms in lover's fashion?' 'I now see clearly enough,' said Thia, 'that you are only deceiving me, and making a mock of me. How can I be fitted for you, who are a gentleman and a citizen of Padua, whilst I am a peasant of the village? You are rich, and I am poor; you are a signor, and I am a working woman; you can have fine ladies to your taste, and I am of low condition. You are wont to walk gaily with your embroidered surcoat, and your bright-coloured hose, all worked with wool and silk, and I, as you see, have nought but a dimity petticoat, old, torn, and mended. I have nothing better when I go to dances than this old garment and this linen head-cloth. You eat wheaten loaves, and I rye-bread and beans and polenta, and even then I have often not enough to satisfy my hunger. I have no pelisse for the cold winter, poor wretch that I am! nor do I know

which way to turn to get one, for I have neither money nor goods to sell that will enable me to buy the few necessities that I want. We have not enough corn to eat to keep us alive till Easter, and I know not what we shall do during the great dearth. And besides all this, there are the forced dues that we have to pay to Padua every day. Oh, we poor peasants! what pleasure have we in life? We toil hard to till the earth and to sow our wheat, which you fine folk consume, whilst we poor people have to make the best shift we can with rye-bread. We tend the vines and make the wine, of which you drink the best, and we have to be satisfied with wine lees or water.'

In answer to Thia's speech Marsilio said: 'Do not distress yourself on account of this, for if you grant me the favour I desire I will see that you want for nothing that can give you delight.' Thia replied: 'Ah! this is what you cavaliers always say until we have done your pleasure; then you go away and

we never see any more of you, and, fools as we are, are left in the lurch, deceived and duped and shamed in the world's esteem. You, meantime, go your ways, bragging of your good fortune and washing out your mouths, as far as concerns us, and all that belongs to us,¹ treating us as if we were carrion only fit to be cast out on the dunghill. I know full well the tricks you worthy citizens of Padua can play.' Then said Marsilio: 'Enough, now let us have done with words for good and all. I ask you once more whether you will grant me the favour I desire?' 'Go away, for the love of God, I pray you,' cried Thia, 'before my husband comes back, for nightfall is drawing near and he will certainly be here in a few minutes. Come back some time to-morrow, and we will talk as long as you will, for in sooth I love you well.' But Marsilio, who was indeed passionately in love with her, was

¹ Orig., *V'ande laldando, e lavando la bocca di fatti nostri.*

loath to leave off this pleasant conversation, and still remained by her side; so she said once more, 'Go away immediately, I beg you, and do not stay here any longer.' When Marsilio saw that Thia was thus strongly moved, he cried out, 'God be with you, Thia, my sweet soul! I recommend my heart to you, for it is surely in your keeping.' 'May God go with you, dearest hope of my life!' said Thia, 'I commend you to His care.' 'By His good help,' said Marsilio, 'we will meet again to-morrow.' 'Very well, let it be so,' said Thia; and with these words Marsilio took his leave.

When the morrow had come Marsilio, to whom the time until he should once more repair to Thia's house seemed a thousand years, went thither forthwith and found her busy in the garden digging and mulching round about certain vines which grew therein, and as soon as they saw one another they exchanged greetings and began to talk lovingly to-

gether. And when this conversation had gone on for some time Thia said to Marsilio : ‘ Dear heart of mine, to-morrow morning early Cechato my husband will have occasion to go to the mill, and he will not return hither until the next day ; wherefore, if it should be your pleasure, you may come here late in the evening. I will be on the watch for you ; only be sure that you come without fail, and do not deceive me.’ When Marsilio heard this good news, there was no man in all the world so happy as he was ; he jumped and danced about for very gladness, and took leave of Thia, half out of his wits for joy.

As soon as Cechato had come home, the crafty Thia went up to him and said, ‘ Cechato, my good man, you must needs go to the mill straightway, for we have nothing more in the house to eat.’ ‘ Very well, very well, I will see about it,’ answered Cechato. ‘ I tell you that you must go to-morrow, whatever happens,’ said Thia. ‘ Very well, then,’

replied Cechato, 'to-morrow morning before I go I will borrow a cart with two oxen from the people for whom I work, then I will come back to load it, and go off to the mill at once.'

In the meantime Thia went to prepare the corn and to put it into sacks, so that on the morrow Cechato should have nothing to do but to load his cart therewith, and to go on his way singing. On the following morning Cechato took the corn which his wife had put into sacks the night before, and loaded it on the cart and went on his way towards the mill. And seeing that it was now the season of short days and long nights, and that the roads were broken up and in bad condition, and that the weather was foul with rain and ice and intense cold, poor Cechato found himself obliged to remain that night at the mill, and this in sooth fell in most opportunely with the plans that Thia and Marsilio had devised for their own satisfaction.

As soon as the dark night had fallen,

Marsilio, according to the agreement he had made with Thia, took a pair of fine well-cooked capons and some white bread and wine unspoilt by any drop of water therein, all of which he had carefully prepared before he left his home, and stole secretly across the fields to Thia's house. Then, having opened the door, he found her sitting by the fire-side winding thread. After greeting one another they spread the table and both sat down to eat, and after they had made an excellent meal off Marsilio's good cheer, they went to lie down in the bed; thus, whilst that poor fool of a Cechato was having his corn ground at the mill, in his bed at home Marsilio was sifting flour.

When the time of sunrise was near, and the day was beginning to break, the two lovers awoke and rose from their bed, fearing lest Cechato might return and find them there together; but while they were still amorously talking, Cechato drew near to the house, whistling aloud

the while, and calling upon Thia, saying: 'Oh, my Thia! make up a good fire, I pray you, for I am more than half dead with cold.' Thia, who was a clever, artful minx, was somewhat frightened when she heard her husband's voice, and feared amain lest some evil should befall Marsilio, and injury and shame be put upon herself; so she quickly opened the door, managing the while to allow Marsilio to hide himself behind it; then with a merry face she ran to meet her husband, and began to embrace him. And after Cechato had come into the courtyard, he cried out once more to his wife: 'Make a fire at once, good Thia, for I am wellnigh frozen to death. By the blood of St. Quintin, I was almost starved to death by cold last night up at that mill; so cold was it, indeed, that I was not able to sleep a wink or even to close an eye.' Whereupon Thia went without delay to the wood-house, and having taken therefrom a good armful of billets she lighted a fire whereat

Cechato might warm himself, herself occupying craftily that spot by the hearth from whence Marsilio might perchance be seen by Cechato.

Then Thia, chatting with her husband of this and of that, said: 'Ah! Cechato, my good man, I have a fine bit of news to give you.' 'What has happened?' inquired Cechato. To this Thia replied, 'Whilst you were away at the mill a poor old man came to the house begging alms of me for the love of God, and as a recompense for some bread I gave him to eat and a small cup of wine, he taught me an incantation wherewith to throw a spell over that greedy kite which often comes hereabouts, and never in my life have I heard anything more beautiful than his words, which I have learnt well by heart.' 'What is this thing you are telling me?' said Cechato; 'is it really the truth?' Thia replied, 'It is true, by my faith, and I can tell you that I set great store by it.' 'Then tell it to me at once,' said Cechato, 'and do not hold

me longer in suspense.' Whereupon Thia said to her husband, 'You must lie down flat on the ground stretched out your full length, just as if you were dead (which thing may God avert !), and having done this you must turn your head and your shoulders towards the door, and your knees and feet towards the stove, and then I must spread a white cloth over your face, and put our corn measure over your head.'

'But I am quite sure,' said Cechato, 'that my head will never go into our corn measure.' 'I am sure it will,' replied Thia ; 'just look here !' And with these words she took the measure, which happened to be close at hand, and put it over his head, saying, 'Nothing in God's world could be a better fit than this. And now you must keep yourself quite still, neither moving a limb nor saying a word, otherwise we shall be able to do nothing. Then I will take our tamis sieve in my hand, and will begin to jump and dance around you, and

whilst I am thus dancing I will speak the incantation which the old man taught me. And in this fashion the spell may be well and truly worked. But again I tell you that you must on no account stir a finger until I shall have repeated the incantation thrice, for it must be said three times over you in order that it may have any effect. After this we shall see whether the kite gives us any more trouble, or comes to steal our chicken.' To this Cechato replied: 'Would to God that what you say might be true, so that we might have a little rest and breathing space. You know well enough how hard we find it to bring up any chicken at all, on account of that fiend of a kite which devours every one we hatch. Never have we been able to rear enough chicken to sell, and with the money gained thereby to pay our landlord and the tax-gatherer, and to buy oil and salt and any other stores we may want for housekeeping.'

'Let us begin quickly then,' said Thia, 'for in this fashion we shall be

able to do ourselves a good turn. Now, Cechato, lie down quickly.' And Cechato straightway laid himself down on the floor. 'Now stretch yourself out well to your full length,' said Thia. And Cechato at once did his best to stretch himself out as far as ever he could.

'That is right,' said Thia, and hereupon she took a cloth of thick white linen and shrouded his face therewith. Next she took the corn measure and rammed it down on his head, and then caught up the *tamis* sieve and began to dance and skip around him and to repeat in the following wise the incantation which she said had been taught her by the old beggar:

Thievish bird, I charge you well,
Hearken to my mystic spell.
While I dance and wave my sieve,
All my tender chicks shall live.
Not a bird from all my hatch,
Thievish rascal, shall you snatch.
Wolf nor rat his prey shall seek,
Nor bird with sharp and crooked beak.

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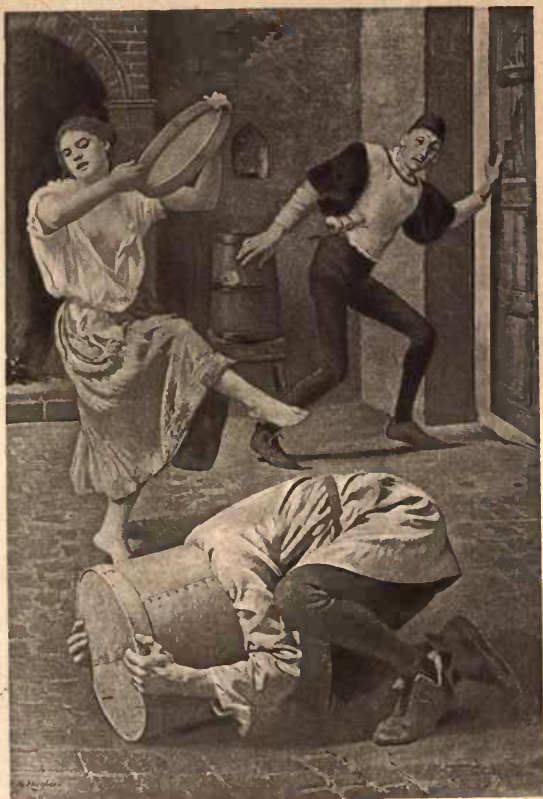
"That is right," said Thia, and hereupon she took a cloth of thick white

The Incantation Of Cechato
Rabboso By Thia

Next she laid it down on his head, and then she sang the following words, and began to dance and wave my feet, and to go

Night the Fifth
FOURTH FABLE
 part in the following was the incantation which she said and then taught her by the old haggas:

Thievish bird, I charge you well,
 Harken to my mystic spell.
 While I dance and wave my feet,
 All my tender chicks shall live,
 Not a bird from all my hatch,
 Thievish rascal, shall you snatch.
 Wolf nor rat his prey shall seek,
 Nor bird with sharp and crooked beak.



Thieves who stand behind the door,
Hearken, fly, and come no more.
If my speech you cannot read,
Surely you are fools indeed.

When Thia had come to the end of her mummery she still went on dancing round Cechato, keeping her eyes fixed upon the outer door the while, and making signs to Marsilio, who was there concealed, that he had better run away at once. But Marsilio, who was neither nimble-minded nor quick to catch her meaning, failed to comprehend what might be the purport of the gestures she was making or what she meant by going through these rites of exorcism; so he kept still in his hiding-place and did not budge an inch. Meantime Cechato, being now half stifled and mightily weary of lying stretched out on the floor, was anxious to get up, and spake thus to Thia: 'Well, is it all over now?' But Thia, who had not been able to induce Marsilio to move from his place behind the door, answered Cechato in these

words: 'Stay where you are, for heaven's sake, and move not at your peril. Did I not tell you that I should have to repeat the incantation three times? I hope you may not have wrecked everything, as it is, by wanting to get up.' 'No, no, surely not,' said Cechato. And Thia made him lie down stretched out as he was before, and began to chant her incantation anew.

Now by this time Marsilio had at last come to understand how matters really stood, and what was the meaning of Thia's mummerly, so he seized the opportunity to slip out from his hiding-place, and to run away as fast as his legs could carry him. Thia, when she saw Marsilio take to his heels and run out of the courtyard, finished her form of exorcism against the kite, and when she had brought it to an end she suffered her cuckoldly fool of a husband to get up from the ground. Then with Thia's help he began forthwith to unload the flour which he had brought back from

the mill. Now Thia when she went with Cechato outside into the courtyard to help unload the flour, saw Marsilio in the distance hurrying away at the top of his speed, whereupon she began to shout after him in a lusty voice: 'Ah, ah! What a wicked bird! Ah, ah! begone, get away! For, by my faith, I will send you packing with your tail between your legs if ever you show yourself here again. Away then, I tell you! Is not he a greedy wretch? Do you not see that the wicked beast was bent on coming back? Heaven give him a bad year!'

And in this fashion it happened, that every time the kite came and flew down into the courtyard to carry away a chick or two, he would first have a bout with the hen herself,¹ who would afterwards set to work with her conjuration as before. Then he would take to flight with his tail down, but all the while the fowls belonging to Cechato and Thia suffered no damage at all from his harrying.

¹ Orig., *in prima el se spellatava con la chiozza.*

This fable, given by the Trevisan, was found to be so mirthful and amusing that the ladies, and the gentlemen as well, almost split their sides with laughter ; so well did he mock the rustic speech that there was no one of the company who would not have judged him to be a peasant of Treviso. And when the merriment had abated somewhat, the Signora turned her fair face towards the Trevisan and spake to him thus : “ In truth, Signor Benedetto, you have this evening diverted us in such featly wise that with one voice we declare your fable may deservedly be held to be the equal of Molino’s in merit. But to fill up the measure of my content and that of this honourable company, I entreat you — an it displease you not — that you will set forth to us an enigma which shall be as graceful in form as amusing in matter.” The Trevisan, when he saw how the Signora was inclined, was unwilling to disappoint her ; so, standing up, with a clear voice and with no hesitation of

any sort, he began his riddle in the following words :

Sir Yoke goes up and down the field,
To every tug is forced to yield.
One on the left, one on the right
Plods on, and next there comes a wight,
A cunning rascal who with power
Beats one who goes on carriers four.
Now if an answer you can give,
Good friends, we will for ever live.

When the Trevisan, with the true manner and bearing of a peasant, had finished his enigma, which was comprehended by few or none of the company, he thus gave the interpretation thereof in peasant dialect in order that its meaning might be made clear to them all :
“ I must not keep this gentle company waiting any longer. Tell me, do you understand the meaning of my enigma? If you do not know, I will tell you. Sir Yoke goes to and fro, that is to say, the yoke, to which the oxen are attached, goes up and down the fields and roads,

and is dragged hither and thither by them. Those who fare, the one on this side and the other on that side of it, are the oxen. He who beats one who stands on four, means that the ploughman who walks behind lashes the bull, who has four legs, with his leathern whip. And to end my explanation, I tell you once more that the answer to my riddle is the yoke, and I hope you will all understand it."

Everyone was greatly interested over this riddle dealing with country life, and, laughing heartily thereat, they praised it highly. But the Trevisan, remembering that only one more story remained to be told this night, to wit, that of the charming Cateruzza, turned with a smiling face towards the Signora and spake thus: "Signora, it is not for the reason that I wish to disturb the settled order of this our entertainment, or to dictate to your highness, my mistress and sovereign lady, but merely to satisfy the desire of this devoted company, that I

beg your excellency to make us the sharers of some fair fancies of your own, by telling us, for our delight and recreation, a story with your wonted grace. And if I peradventure have been more presumptuous (which God forbid) in making this request than is suitable to my humble estate, I beg you will forgive me, seeing that the love I bear towards this gracious assembly has been the chief cause why I have been led to prefer it."

The Signora, when she heard the courteous petition of the Trevisan, at first cast her eyes down upon the ground; not, however, for any fear or shame that she felt, but because she deemed that, for divers reasons, it was more seemly for her to listen than to discourse. But after a time, with a gracious and smiling look, as if her humour were a merry one, she turned her bright face towards the Trevisan and said: "Signor Benedetto, what though your request is a pleasant and seemly one, it appears to me that you are somewhat too insistent a beggar,

forasmuch as the duty of story-telling pertains rather to these young damsels round about than to me ; therefore you must hold me excused if I decline to give way at once to your demand, and bid Cateruzza, who has been chosen by lot to tell the fifth story of this evening, to favour you with her discourse." The merry listeners, who were mightily eager to hear the Signora tell her story, forthwith all rose to their feet and began to support the request of the Trevisan, begging her most earnestly that she would in this matter favour them with her courtesy and kindness, and not stand too severely by the exalted dignity of her position, for time and place will allow anyone, however high in rank, to speak freely whatever thing may be pleasing. The Signora, when she heard the gentle loving terms of this petition, in order that she might not seem ungracious in her bearing, smilingly replied : " Since this is the wish of all of you, and your pleasure withal, that I should con-

clude this evening with some little story of my own, I will gladly grant your wish." And without further demur she blithely began to tell her fable.

THE FIFTH FABLE.

Madonna Modesta, wife of Messer Cristano Zanchetto, in her young days gathers together a great number of shoes, offerings made by her various lovers. Having grown old, she disposes of the same to divers servants, varlets, and other folk of mean estate.



It commonly happens that ill-gotten wealth, and indeed all riches which have been acquired by evil ways, are scattered abroad and dissipated in brief space of time, for by the divine will it has been decreed that, quickly as such riches come, quickly they shall depart. This, indeed, proved to be the case with a certain woman of Pistoia, who, had she been honest and wise in the same degree as she was dissolute and foolish, would never have given occasion for the story which I am

now about to tell to you. And although perhaps this fable of mine is one hardly suitable for your ears, forasmuch as it comes to an end in a picture of shame and dishonour, which obscures and tarnishes the fame of those who live honest lives, nevertheless I will not hesitate to relate it to you, for at the right time and place it may serve (I speak here to those to whom it may apply) as a useful incentive for all to pursue the ways of uprightness and well-doing, and to eschew all wicked courses and lewd inclinations.

I must first tell this worshipful company that, not far from these our days, there lived in Pistoia, an ancient city of Tuscany, a young woman called by name Madonna Modesta, but this name, on account of her reprehensible manner of life and the shameful courses she followed, was one in no wise befitting her. In person, indeed, this woman was very lovely and graceful, though she was of mean condition.

She had a husband called Tristano

Zanchetto¹ (a name as well suited to him as his wife's was unfitting to her), a good-tempered fellow, given to merry company, and thinking of little else save of his business of buying and selling, whereby he gained a good living for himself. Madonna Modesta, who was by nature of a lecherous temper, and inclined for nought else but amorous sport, when she saw that her husband was given up heart and soul to commerce, and careful only about the matters appertaining thereto, took it into her head that she too would embark in merchandise and set up a new trade, concerning which her husband, Messer Tristano, should know nothing.

Wherefore every day she was wont to go out upon the balcony for her amusement, now on one side, now on the other, and throw glances at any gallant who might be passing in the street, and when her eye might chance to fall upon anyone whose appearance pleased her,

¹ *Zanchetto*, *zannetto*, a buffoon, a zany.

she would strive by divers suggestive signs and gestures to arouse his curiosity and desire, and to lure him to her. And in the course of time it proved that Madonna Modesta had no mean skill in the art of traffic ; indeed, so diligent was she in the display of her merchandise, and so carefully did she attend to the needs of her customers, that there was to be found in all the city no one, rich or poor, noble or plebeian, who was not anxious to take and taste of her goods. When, therefore, Madonna Modesta had attained a position of great notoriety in her calling, and had gathered together much wealth thereby, she made up her mind to exact only a very small guerdon from anyone who might come to her as a claimant for her favours. That is to say, she made it her custom to demand from her lovers no greater reward than a pair of shoes, stipulating, however, that each one should give shoes of a sort such as he might in an ordinary way wear himself. Thus, if the lover who

had been with her happened to be a noble, she would expect from him a pair of velvet shoes ; if a burgher, she would ask for a pair of shoes made of fine cloth ; if a mechanic, a pair made of leather. So great a concourse of clients flocked to this good woman's place of business that it was rarely or never empty, and seeing that she was young and beautiful and of fine figure, seeing likewise that the price which she demanded for her favours was such a modest one, all the men of Pistoia freely repaired to her house and took their pleasure therein. At the time of which I am writing, Madonna Modesta had already filled a very large storehouse with shoes, the wealth she had gathered together in her tender amorous calling, and so mighty was the tale of shoes of every sort and quality, that if any man here in Venice had searched diligently every shop in the city he would not have found a third part of the number of shoes which Madonna Modesta had heaped up in her storehouse.

It happened one day that Messer Tristano her husband had need to use this same storehouse for the stowing away of certain chattels and merchandise which by chance had been consigned to him at the same time from divers parts of the world ; so, having called Madonna Modesta his beloved wife, he asked her to hand over to him the keys of the warehouse. And she, like the crafty jade that she was, presented them to him without excuse of any sort ; and the husband, when he opened the storehouse, which he expected would be empty, found it quite full of shoes (as has already been told) of divers qualities. When he saw this he was mightily astonished thereat, and could in no wise understand whence had come this great quantity of shoes of all sorts ; so, having called his wife, he put a question to her as to where these shoes with which his warehouse was filled had come from. To this the astute Madonna Modesta answered in these words : ‘What think you of this, good Messer

Tristano my husband? Did you in sooth set yourself down as the only merchant in this city? Certes, if you did, you were hugely mistaken, for be sure that we women likewise know somewhat concerning the art of traffic; and, although you may be a great merchant, accustomed to concern yourself with many and weighty ventures, I content myself with commerce on a smaller scale. Wherefore I have stored my merchandise in this warehouse, and put it safely under lock and key in order that it may be kept secure. So I beg you to keep your care and watchfulness for the benefit of your own goods and your own traffic, and I will do the same with regard to mine.' Messer Tristano, who knew nothing more than what his wife told him, and asked no further questions, was gratified amain with the exceeding ingenuity and great foresight of his clever and far-seeing wife, and besought her to prosecute with diligence the enterprise she had undertaken. Madonna Modesta therefore continued in

secret to carry on her amorous trade, and, as in the exercise thereof she prospered mightily, she gathered together so vast a store of shoes that she could have easily supplied the wants not only of Pistoia, but of any other great city as well.

Thus whilst Madonna Modesta remained young and full of grace and beauty her trade showed no sign of falling off. But in the process of years cruel Time, the master of all things and all men, who fixes ever a beginning, a middle, and an end for all, so dealt with Madonna Modesta, who had been heretofore fresh and plump and lovely, that he changed the semblance of her face, and of her hair¹ likewise — leaving her desire unsubdued the while — and traced many wrinkles upon her forehead, and disfigured her countenance. Her eyes became rheumy and her breasts all dry and empty as shrivelled bladders, and

¹ Orig., *e mutò le usate penne*. The use of *penne* or *piume* for *capelli* is not uncommon. Thus in Dante, "Che riavesse le maschile penne" (*Inferno*, xx.); "Movendo quell' oneste piume" (*Purgatorio*, i.).

whenever she happened to smile the skin of her face became so puckered that any one who looked at her was fain to laugh and hold her in ridicule. And when the time came that Madonna Modesta was grown old and grey-headed, and lovers no longer sought her to pay court to her as formerly, she found that she added no more shoes to her store, and she lamented bitterly in her heart thereanent. From the first years of her youth until the present hour she had given herself over entirely to the vice of luxury, the destructive enemy of the body and of the purse as well, and she had likewise become more accustomed to dainty living and libidinous life than any other woman in the world, therefore she could find no method or means by which she might withdraw herself from these noxious ways. And although in her body, from day to day, the vital fluid, through which all plants and living things take root and grow, failed more and more, nevertheless the desire of satisfying her wicked

and unrestrained appetite was as violent as ever. Therefore Madonna Modesta, seeing that she was entirely bereft of youthful beauty, and was no longer one to be flattered and caressed by handsome young gallants as in former days, made up her mind to order her plans anew. For the furtherance of these she once more went out upon the balcony, and began to ogle and to spread her lures to catch any varlets or porters or peasants or chimney-sweepers or idle fellows of any sort, who might be passing by, and any of these whom she might attract she would entice into her house for her own purposes, and with them take such pleasure as she had hitherto been wont to take. And as in times past she had always demanded from each one of her lovers a pair of shoes of a quality according with the donor's condition as the reward for her favours granted, now, on the other hand, she found herself obliged to give a pair of shoes from her stock to anyone who would come to her. Madonna Mo-

desta had now sunk into such a shameful state that all the lowest ruffians of Pistoia would betake themselves to her dwelling, some to have their pleasure of her, others to make mock of her and to befool her, and others to receive the disgraceful guerdon which she was wont to give.

In this manner of life pursued by Madonna Modesta, it came to pass that the storehouse, which had once been crammed full of shoes, became wellnigh void. Messer Tristano one day, having a mind to go by stealth and see how his wife was prospering in her commerce, and whether her store of merchandise was increasing, took the key of the warehouse without his wife's knowledge and opened the door, only to find, when he looked in, that nearly all the shoes were gone. Wherefore Messer Tristano was beyond measure amazed, for he could not understand how his wife could have disposed of the many pairs of shoes he had formerly seen there. On this account

he began to fancy that by this time his wife must, as it were, be made of gold by reason of her prosperous traffic, and he felt himself mightily consoled at the thought; for he deemed that he might hereafter be a sharer in her wealth. So he straightway called her to him and thus addressed her: ‘Modesta, I have always rated you as a wise and prudent woman, but this day I chanced to open your storehouse, wishing to see how your commerce was thriving, and deeming that by this time your stock of shoes must have greatly increased, but I found, instead of any increase, that your wares had nearly all disappeared. At first I was mightily astonished thereat, but afterwards it came into my mind that you must have trafficked them away and received therefor a great sum of money, whereupon I was greatly reassured, and if this notion of mine should prove to be correct I shall hold that you have traded at great profit.’

Madonna Modesta, when her husband

had finished his speech, heaved a deep sigh and thus made answer to him : 'Messer Tristano, my husband, do not be amazed at what you have lately seen, for I must tell you that all those shoes you saw some long time ago in my warehouse, have walked away in the same fashion in which they came to me. And over and above this let me tell you that those things which are ill got will, for the most part, ill go in a very brief space of time. Therefore I bid you once more not to wonder or be surprised at what you have seen.' Messer Tristano, who did not in any way fathom the meaning of his wife's words, fell into a great state of fright and confusion, fearing hugely lest a similar mischance might befall the goods and merchandise he himself had collected. However, he forebore to discuss the matter with her farther, but bestirred himself anxiously to see that his own merchandise might not vanish as his wife's had vanished.

Madonna Modesta finding herself now

slighted by men of all sorts and conditions, and entirely beggared of all the shoes she had gained in the course of her lecherous youth, fell into a grave malady, and in a very brief space of time died miserably of consumption. And in this manner Madonna Modesta, who took so little heed for the future, made a shameful end of her life and also of the possessions she had gathered together, leaving nothing behind her to serve as an example to the rest of the world, but rather a disgraceful memory.

When the Signora had ended her short fable all the company began to laugh aloud, and heaped abundant blame upon Madonna Modesta, who lived moderately enough in all things save only in the matter of lecherous indulgence. And again they could not help laughing when they recalled to mind the story of the shoes which were so easily got and so easily spent. But because it was on Cateruzza's account that the Trevisan had urged the Signora to tell

this fable, the latter now began to spur on the damsel with words which, though gently spoken, had a sting therein, and afterwards, as a penalty for having failed to tell her fable, expressly commanded Cateruzza to propound an enigma which should not be irrelevant to the subject of the fable they had just heard. Wherefore Cateruzza, when she heard the command of the Signora, rose from her seat, and turning herself towards her spake thus : “ Dear Signora, the biting rebukes which you have just addressed to me are not in any way displeasing to me ; on the contrary, I gladly take them home to myself with my whole heart. But the task of making my enigma agree in some measure with the fable you have just told us is no light one, seeing that I am entirely unprepared. Since, however, it pleases you to punish in this fashion my fault, if indeed it be a fault, I, as an obedient girl and your most complaisant handmaiden, will begin at once.

My lady seats her in a chair,
And raises then her skirts with care ;
And as I know she waits for me,
I bring her what she fain would see.
Then soft I lift her dainty leg,
Whereon she cries, ‘Hold, hold, I beg!
It is too strait, and eke too small ;
Be gentle, or you’ll ruin all.’
And so to give her smallest pain,
I try once more, and eke again.”

The enigma told by Cateruzza provoked as great laughter as the ingenious fable which the Signora had recently given ; but, for the reason that certain of the listeners put thereupon a somewhat lewd interpretation, she set herself at once to make the honesty of her intent clear to them in as civil terms as she could use : “ Noble ladies, the real subject of my enigma is nothing greater or less than a tight shoe ; for when the lady has sat down, the shoemaker, with the shoe in his hand, raises her foot, whereupon she tells him to put the shoe on gently, as it is too tight, and causes her much pain. Then he takes it off

and puts it on again and again till it fits her well, and she is content therewith."

When the explication of Cateruzza's enigma had been brought to an end and highly praised by the whole company, the Signora, seeing that the hour was now late, gave order that under pain of her displeasure no one should leave the place, and, having bidden them summon into her presence the trusty steward of the household, she directed him to set out the tables in the great hall. And while the feast was in course of preparation she proposed that the ladies and gentlemen should divert themselves with the dance, and, after the dance was finished, they sang two songs. Then the Signora rose to her feet and went into the supper room, having the Signor Ambassador on one hand and Messer Pietro Bembo on the other, the rest of the company following in their due order. And when they had washed their hands, each one sat down according to his rank at the table, which was richly

spread with rare and delicate dishes and new wines. When this merry feast had come to end amidst the loving discourse of the guests, each one being in blither mood than ever, they rose from the board and forthwith began to sing and dance in a circle. But forasmuch as the rosy light of dawn was now beginning to appear, the Signora bade the servants to kindle the torches and go in attendance on the Signor Ambassador as far as the steps, having first begged him and all the others to return to the meeting-place at the appointed hour.

The End of the Fifth Night.

Right the Sixth.



Night the Sixth.

THE shadows of a night sombre and overcast had diffused themselves o'er all around, and the brilliant stars in the ample-domed heaven no longer gave their light, and Æolus, sweeping over the salt waves with a long-drawn moan, stirred up a tempestuous sea and blew hard against shipmen and voyagers, when our noble and faithful band of companions, caring nought for the violent wind or the swelling waves or for the cruel cold, betook themselves to their accustomed meeting-place and sat down in due order, having first made a respectful reverence to the Signora. She forthwith ordered the golden vase to be brought to her, and placed therein the names of five ladies. The first to be drawn out

was that of Alteria, the second of Arianna, the third of Cateruzza, the fourth of Lauretta, and the fifth of Eritrea. This done the Signora directed these five to sing a canzonetta, and they at once obeyed her command and began to discourse sweetly the following song.

SONG.

O Love ! if faith rose with thee at thy birth ;
If ye, twin flowers of earth,
Should twine around my lady's name
And deck the presence I adore ;
Then never more
Should they divide, or time let sink my loyal flame.

She feels your power indeed, but not enough
To let your onslaught rough
Sway all her nature, and release
Her passions kept so well in hand.
And thus I stand
With failing hope, while my desire doth aye increase.

When the singing of this sweet and most pleasant song was finished, Alteria, who had been chosen to tell the first story, laid aside her viol and bow and thus began.

THE FIRST FABLE.

Two men who are close friends dupe one another
and in the end have their wives in common.



ANY are the tricks and deceptions which men nowadays practise one upon another, but of the whole mass of these you will find none comparable in craft and knavery to those which one friend will use in imposing upon another. And since it has fallen to my lot to open the entertainment this evening with a story, it has come into my mind to give you an account of the subtlety and cunning and treachery which a certain man employed in the befooling of another who was a close friend of his own. And although the first one who tried this knavish game completely duped his friend by the amazing cunning he displayed, yet in the end he found himself tricked by a craft and ingenuity no whit inferior to his own. All of which shall be clearly

set forth to you if you will of your kindness give a hearing to my story.

In the famous and ancient city of Genoa there lived in times past two friends, of whom one was called by name Messer Liberale Spinola, a man of great wealth, and at the same time one much addicted to the pleasures of the world, and the other Messer Arthilao Sara, one of the chief merchants of the city. The friendship between these two was very warm and close; so great, indeed, was their attachment the one for the other, that they could scarce endure to be apart. And if it should happen by any chance that either one of these had need of aught belonging to the other, he could claim it without delay or hindrance. And seeing that Messer Arthilao was engaged in numerous ventures in merchandise, and had in hand many affairs, both on his own account and on the account of others, he one day had to set out on a journey to Soria. Wherefore, having sought out his dear friend Messer Libe-

rale, he thus addressed him in the same sincere and benevolent spirit he ever felt towards him: ‘My friend, you know well, and it is manifest to all men, how great is the love and affection subsisting between us, how I always have relied and still rely upon you, both on account of the friendship we have had for each other for so many years past, and on account of the vow of brotherhood that there is between us. Wherefore, because I have settled in my mind to go to Soria, and because there is no other man in the world whom I trust as I trust you, I come with all boldness and confidence to you to entreat you to do me a favour, which thing, though it may cause no little disturbance to your own economy, I beg that you of your goodness, and for the sake of our mutual good feeling, will not deny me.’ Messer Liberale, who was fully inclined to do his friend any kindness he might ask for, without further words concerning the matter, said: ‘Arthilao, my dear friend, the love we

have one for the other, and the bond of fellowship which our sincere affection has knitted between us, ought to render unnecessary all such discourse as this. Tell me now, without keeping aught behind, what your wishes may be, and lay me under your orders, for I am ready to discharge whatever duty you may put upon me.' Then said Messer Arthilao to his friend: 'My desire and request of you is to beg you that, so long as I shall be away, you will take under your charge the government of my house, and in like manner of my wife, calling her attention to anything that may be wanted, and whatever sum of money you may disburse on her behalf I will pay you in full on my return.' Messer Liberale, when he understood what his friend wanted of him, first gave him hearty thanks for the high opinion he had of his probity, in that he held him in such good esteem,¹ then he freely promised Messer Arthilao to discharge, to the best

¹ Orig., *del conto che facea*.

of his poor abilities, the task which had been put upon him.

When the time had come for Messer Arthilao to set out on his voyage, having first bestowed all his merchandise on board his ship, he recommended his wife Daria — who, as it happened, was three months gone with child — to the care of his friend, and then set forth, sailing out of Genoa with his sails spread to a favouring wind, and with good fortune to aid him. As soon as Messer Arthilao was embarked and well on his way outward Messer Liberale betook himself to the house of Madonna Daria, his well-beloved neighbour, and thus spake to her : ‘ Madonna, Messer Arthilao, your good husband and my very dearest friend, before he set forth on this voyage, besought me with the most pressing entreaties to take under my charge the care of all his affairs, and of you yourself, madonna, as well ; and likewise to keep you mindful of all the things for your good of which you may stand in

need. I, for the sake of the affection which always has existed and still exists between him and me, promised him that I would perform any duty he might lay upon me. Wherefore I have come to you at once in order that you may let me know your will, without hindrance, concerning any matter which may suggest itself to you.'

Now Madonna Daria, who was by nature very sweet and gentle, thanked Messer Liberale heartily for this speech, begging him at the same time to be as good as his word if at any time she should find herself in need of his good offices. To this Messer Liberale answered that he assuredly would not fail her, and, in discharge of his promise, he was very constant in his visits to his fair neighbour, and took good care that she wanted for nothing. In the course of time it came to his knowledge that she was with child, but feigning to be ignorant thereof, he said one day to her, 'Madonna, how are you feeling? doubt-

less somewhat estranged on account of the absence of your husband, Messer Arthilao.' And to this Madonna Daria answered, 'Of a surety, my good neighbour, I feel his absence for many reasons, but above all on account of my present condition.' 'And in what condition,' said Messer Liberale, 'may you find yourself?' 'I am three months gone with child,' Madonna Daria replied, 'and there is moreover something strange about this pregnancy of mine. I never felt myself so ill at ease before.' Messer Liberale when he heard this said, 'But, my good neighbour, are you really with child?' 'I would it were you instead, my friend,' said Madonna Daria, 'and that I were well quit of it.'¹

Now on account of what had passed it ensued that, in the course of interviews of this kind with his fair neighbour, Messer Liberale was so much charmed by her beauty and her soft plump figure, that he became hotly in-

¹ Orig., *e io farei digiuna.*

flamed with amorous desire for her, and night and day could turn his thoughts to nothing else than how he might obtain gratification of his dishonest wishes, but the love in which he held his friend Messer Arthilao kept him back for a time. But after a while, spurred on by the violence of his passion, which melted all his good resolutions, he went one day to Madonna Daria, and said, 'Alas ! my dear friend, how deeply grieved I am that Messer Arthilao should thus have gone away from you and left you pregnant ; because, on account of his sudden departure, he may very well have forgotten to complete the child which he begat and which you now carry in your womb. On this account, perchance, it has come to pass that your pregnancy is such an uneasy one.' 'O ! my friend,' cried Madonna Daria, 'do you really believe that the infant which I bear in my womb may be lacking in one or other of its limbs, and that I may be suffering therefor ?' 'Of

a truth,' replied Messer Liberale, 'that is my opinion; nay, I hold it for certain that my good friend Messer Arthilao failed to give it the due number of limbs. It often happens in cases of this sort that one child is born lame and another blind, one of this fashion and another of that.' 'Ah! my dear friend,' said Madonna Daria, 'this thing you tell me greatly troubles my mind. Where shall I look for a remedy, so that this misfortune may not befall me?' 'My dear neighbour,' Messer Liberale replied, 'be of good cheer and do not distress yourself in vain, for know that a remedy is to be found for everything except death.' 'I beg you, for the love you bear to your absent friend,' said Madonna Daria, 'that you will put me in the way of finding this remedy; and the sooner you can let me have it, the more I shall be bound to you; then there will be no danger lest the child should be born imperfect.

When Messer Liberale found that he

had brought Madonna Daria into a mood favourable for his purpose, he said to her: ‘ Dear lady, it would be great baseness and cowardice in a man if, when he saw his friend ready to perish, he did not stretch out his hand to aid him. Wherefore, seeing that I am able to supply the defects which your infant at present has, I should be a traitor to you and should be working you great wrong if I did not come to your assistance.’ ‘ Then, my dear friend,’ said the lady, ‘ do not make any longer delay, but set to work straightway, so that the child may be made perfect at once; for, besides the pity of it, it would be a most grievous sin.’ ‘ Do not let any doubt on this score trouble you,’ said Liberale; ‘ I will discharge my duty to the full; and now give orders to your waiting-woman that she get ready the table, and in the mean time we will make a beginning of the good work we have in hand.’

Thus, while the waiting-woman was

getting in order the table, Messer Liberale went with Madonna Daria into the bedchamber, and having made fast the door, he began to caress her and kiss her, giving her the most loving embracements man ever gave to woman. Madonna Daria was mightily astonished when she saw what Messer Liberale's treatment was, and said to him : 'What does this mean, Messer Liberale? Is it right that we should do such things in such fashion, good neighbours and friends though we be? Alack a day! it is too great a sin ; though, if this were not so, I do not know that I should refuse to consent to your wishes.'

Then replied Messer Liberale, 'Pray tell me which is the greater sin, to lie with your friend, or to let this infant come into the world maimed and imperfect?' 'I judge that the greater sin would be,' replied Madonna Daria, 'to let a child be born, through the fault of its parents, in an imperfect state.' 'Then,' rejoined Messer Liberale, 'you

would assuredly be guilty of a great offence were you to refuse to let me bring to pass all that work your husband left undone in the formation of the child.' Now the lady, who desired greatly that her offspring should come into the world perfect in all its members, gave credence to these words of her neighbour, and, notwithstanding the close tie between him and her husband, she gave way to his desires, and many and many a time hereafter they took their pleasure together. Indeed, so pleasant to the lady seemed this method of restoring to her infant whatever might be wanting, that she was ever begging Messer Liberale to take good heed lest he should fail, as her husband had failed before. Liberale, who found he had fallen upon a very dainty morsel, did his best, both by day and night, to make up anything which might be wanting in the child, so that it might be born perfect in every way. And when Madonna Daria had gone her full time, she was

brought to bed with a lusty boy, who proved to be the very counterpart of Messer Arthilao, and perfectly formed, lacking nothing whatsoever in any of his parts. On this score the lady was overjoyed, and full of gratitude to Messer Liberale as the cause of her good fortune.

After a short time had passed Messer Arthilao returned to Genoa and betook himself to his home, where he found his wife restored to health and fair as ever, and she, full of joy and merriment, ran to meet him with her baby in her arms, and they embraced and kissed one another heartily. And as soon as Messer Liberale got news of the return of his friend, he quickly went to see and greet him, congratulating him on his happy return and on his well-being. A few weeks later it happened that Messer Arthilao, as he sat at table one day with his wife and fondled the child, spake thus: 'O Daria, my wife, what a beautiful child

this one of ours is ! Did you ever see one better made ? Look at its whole presence, and admire its pretty face and its bright eyes, which sparkle as if they were stars !' And thus, feature by feature, he went on praising the shapely boy. Then Madonna Daria answered : ' Of a truth there is nothing wanting in him, but that is not altogether owing to your fine performances, my good man ; because, as you know well enough, I was three months gone with child when you went away, and the child which I had conceived was not yet fully furnished with his members, whereby I had like to have had grave mischance in my pregnancy. Wherefore we have great cause to thank our good neighbour Messer Liberale, who was most eager and diligent to supply out of his own strength all that was lacking in the child, making good all those parts where your own work had failed.' Messer Arthilao listened to and fully understood this speech of his wife, and

felt wellnigh beside himself with rage. It seemed as if he had a sharp knife in his heart, for he quickly comprehended that Messer Liberale had played the traitor to him and had debauched his wife; but, like a sensible man, he feigned not to have understood the meaning of what he had heard, and held his peace, turning the discourse, when he spoke again, upon other matters.

But when he was risen from the table, Messer Arthilao began to cogitate over the strange and shameful conduct of his friend, whom he had loved and esteemed far above any other man in the world, and day and night he brooded and planned in what fashion, and by what method, he might best avenge himself for the great offence which had been wrought against his honour. The poor wight, thus enraged, harboured ever these projects, scarcely knowing what course he would take, but in the end he determined to

do a certain thing which would let him bring to pass the issue he especially willed and desired. Wherefore one day he said to his wife, 'Daria, see that tomorrow our table may be furnished a little more generously than is our wont, because I wish to invite Messer Liberale and Madonna Propertia his wife, our good neighbours, to dine with us; but take heed that, as you love your life, you speak not a word of any sort, and let pass anything you may see or hear without remark or notice.' And Madonna Daria agreed to do as he proposed. Then having left the house he betook himself to the piazza, where he met his neighbour, Messer Liberale, whom, together with his wife, Madonna Propertia, he bade come together on the following day. And Messer Liberale gladly accepted the invitation.

On the following day the two invited guests repaired to the house of Messer Arthilao, where they met a most friendly greeting and reception. And when they

were all gathered together and were conversing on this thing and that, Messer Arthilao spake thus to Madonna Propertia : ‘ Dear neighbour, while they are getting ready the viands and setting the table, I would you took some trifle to sustain you.’ And, having led her aside into a chamber, he handed to her a beaker of drugged wine with a toast thereto, both of which she took, and, without any fear whatever, ate the toast and emptied the beaker of wine. Then they returned, and, having placed themselves at the table, began merrily the dinner.

But long before the feast had come to an end, Madonna Propertia began to feel drowsiness stealing over her, so that she could scarce hold open her eyes, and Messer Arthilao when he perceived this said : ‘ Madonna, will it please you to go and rest yourself a little ; peradventure last night your slumber was broken,’ and with these words he conducted her into a chamber where, having thrown herself upon the bed, she fell asleep at

once. Messer Arthilao, fearing lest the potency of his draught should pass off,¹ and that time might fail him for the carrying out of the project which he was secretly keeping in his mind, called Messer Liberale and said to him: 'Neighbour, let us go out for a little, and leave your good wife to sleep as long as she may need; peradventure she was astir somewhat too early this morning and is in want of sleep.' Then they both went out and betook themselves to the piazza, where Messer Arthilao made believe to be pressed in the despatch of certain matters of business, and having bidden farewell to his friend, returned privily to his own house, and, being come there, stole quietly into the chamber where Madonna Propertia was lying. When he went up to the bed he perceived that she was sleeping quietly, whereupon, without being espied by any one of the people in the house or rousing the notice of the lady herself, he took away from her, with

¹ Orig., *non venisse à meno.*

the utmost lightness of hand, the rings she wore on her fingers and the pearls from about her neck, and withdrew from the chamber.

The effects of the medicated draught had entirely dissipated themselves by the time Madonna Propertia awoke, and, when she felt inclined to rise and leave the bed, she remarked that her pearls and her rings were missing; so, having got up, she searched here and there and everywhere, turning everything upside down without finding any trace of the thing she was seeking. Wherefore, mightily upset, she rushed out of the room and began to question Madonna Daria whether by chance she might not have taken her pearls and rings, but Madonna Daria assured her friend that she had seen nothing of them; whereupon Madonna Propertia was wellnigh beside herself with agony. While the poor lady was thus distraught with grief and anxiety, without any notion as to where she should seek a remedy for her

trouble, who should come in but Messer Arthilao, and he, when he saw his friend's wife so painfully agitated, said in a somewhat diffident tone: 'What has come to you, dear friend, that you are in such trouble?' In answer to this question Madonna Propertia told him the whole misfortune which had befallen her; whereupon Messer Arthilao, making as if he knew nought of the matter, thus spake to her: 'Make a close search, Madonna, and consider well whether you may not have put these your jewels in some place which you no longer remember. But in any case, supposing that you should not be able to find them, I promise you, on the faith of our old friendship, that I will make such an investigation of the matter that they who have taken away these things of yours will find they have played a bad turn for themselves; but first, before we put our hands to the business, I beg that you will once more make a diligent search in every corner.

Whereupon the ladies and the serving-women as well searched and re-searched the house from top to bottom, turning everything upside down and finding nothing. Messer Arthilao remarking their ill success, began to make an uproar through the house, threatening now this one and now that with ill handling, but they all swore solemnly that they had no knowledge of the matter. Then Messer Arthilao, turning towards Madonna Propertia said: 'My dear neighbour, be not overcome by this trouble, but keep a light heart, for I am at your service to see this matter to an end. And you must know, my dear friend, that I am the possessor of a secret of so great virtue and efficiency that by its working I shall be able to lay my hand on the man, whoever he may be, who has taken your jewels.

When she heard these words Madonna Propertia said: 'Oh, Messer Arthilao! of your kindness I beg you to make this experiment, in order that there may

be no cause for Messer Liberale to suspect me, or to think of me as an evil-doer.' Whereupon Messer Arthilao, seeing that the time was now come when he might meetly work his vengeance for the injury which had been done him of late, called for his wife and for the serving-women, and strictly charged them that they should get them gone out of the chamber, and that no one of them should dare to come near to it under any pretence, except he should summon her thither. And when his wife and the women folk were gone, Messer Arthilao closed the door of the chamber, and having drawn with a bit of charcoal a circle on the floor and figured therein certain signs and characters of his own invention, said to Madonna Propertia: 'Now, my dear friend, lie down on that bed and take heed you move not, neither have any fear on account of anything you may feel, forasmuch as I will not go hence till I shall have found your jewels.' 'You need not have the small-

est fear,' said Madonna Propertia, 'that I will budge an inch, nor indeed do the least thing of any sort, unless I have your commands thereanent.' Then Messer Arthilao, having turned himself towards the right, made certain signs upon the floor, then turning to the left made other signs and conjurations in the air, and pretending the while to be conversing with a multitude of spirits, uttered all sorts of strange noises in a fictitious voice in such a way that Madonna Propertia was not a little bewildered, but Messer Arthilao, who had foreseen this, reassured her, and speaking comforting words to her bade her not to be affrighted. And when he had been within the circle for about half a quarter of an hour, he began to speak certain words in a gurgling tone, which were as follows :

What I have not found, what I am seeking still,
Lies hid in a valley deep beneath a smiling hill;
The one who holds it now, is the one who lost it
then ;
So take your fishing-rod and you'll win it back again.

Madonna Propertia was fully as much astonished as pleased as she listened to these words, and, when the incantation was finished, Messer Arthilao said: 'Dear friend, you have heard all that was said. The jewels which, as you believed, you have lost, are somewhere about you. There is no need for any further grief. Keep up your spirits, and we will find them all. But it is necessary that I should seek for them in the place where you understand they are.' The lady, who was very desirous to get back her jewels, answered eagerly: 'Good friend, I fully comprehend all this. Do not delay, I beg you, but begin your search with all despatch.' Whereupon Messer Arthilao came forth out of the circle, and, having made ready for his sport by lying down beside the lady on the bed, straightway began his fishing, and at the same moment when he made his first cast, he drew forth a ring from his bosom (without the lady seeing it), and this he handed to her, saying: 'See,

Madonna, how successful, how good a fisherman I am, how at the first cast I have recovered your diamond !' Madonna Propertia, when she saw the diamond, was greatly pleased and said : ' Ah, my good, kind friend ! I pray you not yet to cease your fishing ; then perhaps you will get back all the other jewels I have lost.' Messer Arthilao kept on at his angling like a man, now bringing out one lost jewel, now another, working so well with his tackle that finally he recovered and handed back to the lady every article that had been lost.

For this service Madonna Propertia was highly grateful and quite satisfied with the issue of the affair, and, having got back all her precious jewels, she said to Messer Arthilao : ' Dear friend, see how many and valuable things you have recovered for me by your good faith and diligence ; peradventure by another cast of your line in the same place you might win back for me a beautiful little kettle which was stolen from me some days

ago and which I prized very highly. Then Messer Arthilao answered : ‘ Most willingly would I do this, were I not somewhat wearied just at present over what I have already done. Be assured that at some future time I shall be quite ready to make a trial to get back your kettle, and I have good hope that we may succeed.’ Madonna Propertia was fully content with this proposition, and, having taken leave of Messer Arthilao and Donna Daria, she took her jewels and returned home with a light heart.

A short time after this it happened that one morning, when Madonna Propertia was lying in bed with her husband, and the two chatting pleasantly together, she said to him : ‘ Oh, husband ! i’faith consider whether you might not, by taking a turn of fishing, find for me the little kettle which we lost a long time ago : because, forsooth, some days since I happened to miss certain of my jewels, and Messer Arthilao, our good neighbour, was kind enough to come to my aid,

and, by fishing for them most skilfully, found every one of them and gave them back to me. And when I begged him that he would try another cast with the view of finding the kettle, he told me that he was unable to recover it just then, seeing that he had wearied himself somewhat by the fishing he had already done on my behalf. Wherefore, I beg you, let us two make a trial to see whether we may not be able to get it back.'

Messer Liberale, when he listened to this speech, understood well enough what manner of repayment his neighbour had made him for his own trick, and, holding his peace, was fain to pocket the affront patiently. On the following morning the two neighbours, when they met upon the piazza, looked narrowly one at the other, but neither of them had the courage to broach the subject, so nothing was said on one side or the other. Nor did they take their wives into their confidence, but the issue of the affair was that for the future a common

right was established for either one to take his diversion with the wife of the other.

This story told by Alteria was so mightily to the taste of the company that it seemed as if they would have gone on for the rest of the evening making remarks thereanent, and discussing the craft and dexterity with which the one friend had duped the other. But the Signora, when she saw that the laughter and the frolicsome speeches promised to go on somewhat longer than was meet, gave the word that the merriment should stop, and that Alteria should follow the established rule by propounding her enigma. Whereupon she, without making any further delay, thus gave it :

A useful thing, firm, hard, and white,
Outside in shaggy robe bedight ;
Hollowed within right cleverly,
It goes to work both white and dry.
When after labour it comes back,
You'll find it moist and very black ;

For service it is ready ever,
And fails the hand that guides it never.

This enigma given by Alteria awakened amongst her hearers fully as much pleasure as had her story. And, notwithstanding the fact that certain traits thereof might seem somewhat to affront modesty, the ladies did not on this account forbear to discuss it, because they had on another occasion heard the same thing. But Lauretta, feigning to have no inkling of the meaning of the enigma, besought Alteria to explain it, and the latter, with a merry countenance, spake thus to her questioner: "It is superfluous labour to carry crocodiles to Egypt, or vases to Samos, or owls to Athens. However, to do your pleasure, I will unfold my riddle. I declare that the instrument, partly plumed and partly perforated, is simply a pen such as one employs in writing, which, before one dips it in the inkstand, is white and dry, but when it is withdrawn therefrom

is black and moistened and ready to serve the writer who holds it in whatever way he will." As soon as Alteria had finished this explanation of her pretty riddle, Arianna, who was sitting beside her, stood up and began to tell her story.

THE SECOND FABLE.

Castorio, wishing to become fat, submits himself to treatment at the hands of Sandro, and being half dead thereby is soothed by a jest of Sandro's wife.



THE fable which Alteria has just told to us with no less grace than discretion calls back to my mind a certain drollery, as laughable perchance as hers, which I heard briefly told from the mouth of a noble gentlewoman a short time ago. And, if I should not succeed in setting it forth with that distinction and elegance with which it was told to me, I must beg you to hold me excused, seeing that nature has been niggard to me of those

fine qualities granted so liberally to the lady of whom I speak.

Somewhat below Fano, a city of the Marches, situated on the shore of the Adriatic sea, there is a small town called Carignano, numbering amongst its people many lusty youths and fair damsels, and there, amongst others, dwelt a peasant named Sandro, one of the most witty and rollicking fellows nature ever made, and, for the reason that he recked nought of anything save what gave him pleasure, let things go well or ill, he became so ruddy and fat that his flesh resembled nothing so much as a bit of larded bacon. And he, when he had come to the age of forty, took to wife a woman just as good-humoured and fat as himself, and a week never passed in which this good woman would not carefully shave her husband's beard in order that he might look more seemly and frolicsome. It chanced that a certain Messer Castorio, a gentleman of Fano, rich and young, but of slender wit, purchased in the com-

mune of Carignano a farm, on which stood a house of moderate size, and there, with two of his servants and a lady whom he entertained for his pleasure, he would spend a greater part of the summer. One day when Castorio, according to his custom, was walking through the fields after dinner, he marked Sandro, who was turning up the earth with his crooked plough, and seeing what a fine fat ruddy fellow the peasant was with his smiling face, he said: 'Good neighbour, I cannot think what can be the reason that I am so lank and lean, as you see, while you are ruddy and well fleshed. Every day I eat the nicest viands and drink the costliest wines; I lie in bed as long as pleases me, and want for nothing. No man in all the world longs so keenly as I do to get fat, but the greater pains I take to that end, the leaner I grow. Now all the winter you eat nought but the coarsest food, and drink watered wine; you rise up to go to your work while it is yet night, and

all summer long you never have an hour's rest ; nevertheless your rosy face and your well-covered ribs make you a pleasure to behold. Wherefore, being greatly desirous to become fat, I beg you that you will, to the best of your knowledge and power, help me to lay on flesh, and tell me the method you have employed so greatly to your own advantage. Then, over and beyond the fifty gold florins which I purpose to give you forthwith, I promise to reward you in such wise that, for the rest of your life, you will assuredly be well satisfied with what I do for you, and rest content.'

Now Sandro, who was both cunning and roguish in grain, and was one of the red-haired sort, refused flatly to tell Castorio what he wanted to know so eagerly ; but, after a little, feigning to be overcome by the importunities of Castorio, and amazingly taken in reality by the notion of fingering those fifty gold florins, he let loose his tongue somewhat, and, having given over his ploughing

for a little, he sat down beside Castorio and spake thus: 'Signor Castorio, you say you are mightily astonished over my fatness and likewise over your own lean condition, believing the while that a man gets fat or thin by reason of what he may eat or drink; but in this you are vastly in error, for one may see any day eaters in any number, and drinkers as well, who rather gormandize than eat their food, and nevertheless are as thin as lizards. But if you will do for yourself what I have done, I will warrant you will soon be as fat as I am.' Then said Castorio, 'And what is the thing you did?' Sandro answered, 'Why, about a year ago I made a gelding of myself, and from the self-same hour when I did this I grew fat as you see.' 'But I wonder you did not meet your death thereby,' replied Castorio. 'What do you mean by death?' cried Sandro, 'seeing that the practitioner who did the business for me had such skill of hand that I felt not the least pain or hurt, and

from that very time my flesh has been like the flesh of a young child. Of a truth I have never felt myself so well and happy as I find myself to-day.' 'And tell me, I pray you, the name of the man who did this service to you,' said Castoria. 'Ah! but he is dead, good man,' replied Sandro. 'Alas! cried Castorio, 'what shall we do then seeing that he is dead?' Then Sandro answered: 'Do not be cast down; let me tell you that this good man, before he gave up the ghost, taught me, and made me the master of his art, which, from that time onward, I have regularly practised, castrating vast quantities of calves and fowls and other animals, which, as soon as I have tried my hand upon them, always lay on fat in a fashion that is wonderful to behold. Now, if you will only leave the charge of this matter to me, I will pledge myself that you will be highly contented with my handiwork.' 'But I fear I may die under the operation,' said Castorio. 'What folly is this you

say? Death, forsooth! Look at the calves and the capons and the other animals I deal with in my calling; how many of these die?' cried Sandro. Whereupon Castorio, who was possessed with a stronger desire to grow fat than had ever infected man before, said he would take time to consider the business.

But Sandro, who saw that Castorio in truth was fully determined to follow the advice he had given him, bade him not delay, but to allow him straightway to try his art upon him. The foolish fellow agreed, and Sandro, who had with him a knife as sharp as a razor, at once set to work, and in a few seconds of time made a capon of Messer Castorio. Then he took some sweet oil and the juice of certain herbs and made therewith a dressing, which he applied to the wound, and then helped Castorio to get up on his feet, as proper a eunuch as there was in the world. Castorio put his hand in his pocket and took therefrom fifty golden

florins, which he gave to Sandro, and then, having taken leave of the crafty peasant, he went back to his house.

But before Castorio had known an hour's experience of life as a gelding, he began to feel the greatest pain and anguish that ever man had felt. He could never get rest for a single moment, and day by day his trouble increased, so that he was in great danger of death, and at the same time an offence to those about him. When this intelligence came to Sandro's ears, he was mightily affrighted thereanent, and began heartily to wish that he had never played this scurvy trick upon Castorio, fearing lest the latter should indeed die of his injuries. Castorio, when he found himself brought into such a pitiable state, was so inflamed with rage on account of the pain he suffered and of the disgrace which must fall upon him, that he determined at all hazard to kill Sandro forthwith. So, to set about the business in the fashion he judged most fitting, he went, accom-

panied by two of his servants, to the house of Sandro, whom he found at supper, and spake thus: 'Sandro, this is a fine trick you have played me, and one which will assuredly be the death of me; but before I die I promise you shall pay the price of the wickedness you have wrought.' To this Sandro replied: 'The affair was your own and none of mine, because it was by your prayers and supplications alone that I was induced to do this thing for you. But, in order that I may not seem to you as wanting in skill over my work, nor ungrateful for the reward you have given me, nor be reckoned as the cause of your undoing, I will ask you to come to me to-morrow morning in good time in my field, and there I will give you relief which will set you free at once from all fear of death on account of your ailment.'

As soon as Castorio had gone Sandro broke out into bitter weeping, wishing anxiously to fly the country at once and

to betake himself into some foreign land, deeming that he heard the tread of the officer of justice always at his heels, about to put him in bonds. His wife, when she saw how overwrought with grief and care he was, and knowing nought of the reason thereof, inquired of him why he bore himself thus mournfully, whereupon he told her the whole story, word for word. The wife, as soon as she had rightly comprehended the cause of her husband's dismay, and taken heed, moreover, of the fact that Castorio himself was a dolt and a willing, and that he of a surety stood in some peril of death, was at first somewhat troubled in mind herself, and began by rating her husband for his folly in thus having thrust his head into such danger. But afterwards she fell into a gentler mood, and comforted him, begging him to keep a light heart, for she would set to work to order the course of events so that he would be free from all serious danger.

Next morning, when the appointed hour had come, the wife took the garments of Sandro her husband, and, having put them on her back and a cap upon her head, she went afield with the oxen and the plough and set to work to plough the land, keeping a watch to see whether Castorio came as appointed or not. Before long he appeared, and, deeming that the wife of Sandro must be Sandro himself at work ploughing his field, he spake thus: "Sandrin,¹ je meurs si ne prens pitié de moy, car la playe que m'as faicte n'est encores refermée, joint que la chair en est toute pourrie, et rend telle puanteur que je doute de mon salut. Et si en bref ne me donnes le remède nécessaire, tu me verras mourir à tes pieds.' La femme desguisée en Sandrin luy demanda veoir sa playe, et qu'elle y pourvoiroit. Adonc Castor, destachant sa brayette et hausante le devant de sa chemise, luy monstra l'overture que le

¹ Translation by Pierre de la Rivey.

chancre avoit desja toute gastée. Ce que voiant, ceste femme luy dit en souz-riant : ‘ Monsieur, vous monstrez bien que n’avez point de cœur de craindre la mort pour si peu de chose, que pensez neantmoins irreparable ; mais vous estes trompé si le croyez ainsi ; et quoy ! si vous estiez comme moy, que seroit ce ? Il y a un an entier que ma playe me fut faicte beaucoup plus grand que la vostre, toutesfois elle n’est encores consolidée, neantmoins vous voyez comme je suis gras, potelé et frais comme un œillet. Et affin que ne doutiez de ce que je vous dy, je vous en veux bien monstrier l’expérience.’ Ce disant, s’affermit d’une jambe contre terre, et levant l’autre sur les manches de la charue, haussa ses accoustrements et laschant une vesse lui fit baisser la teste pour regarder. Castor voyant ceste grand overture, n’estre encor refermée depuis le temps, se rejouist en soy meme, deliberant de là en avant endurer patiemment la douleur que pro-

venoit de ceste incisure. Tellement que prenant courage au bout de quelque temps le pauvre commença a se guarir et devenir si gras et refaict qu'il donnoit plaisir a qui le regardoit.

Les dames risent assez de Castro lequel estoit demeuré sans tesmoins mais la risée des hommes fut beaucoup plus grande quand ils veirent la femme de Sandrin, desguisée en son mary, lui monstra la nature. Et pour ce qu'aucun de la troupe ne se pouvoit abstenir de rire Madame se frappant les mains l'une contre l'autre fit signe qu'on se teust et qu'Ariane suivist l'ordre en recitant son enigme. La quelle pour ne sembler moins propre et gentille que les autres, dit ainsi :

Je veux que mon amy sur le ventre se couche,
Et pour le soulager voici ce que je fais ;
Je prens a belles mains la chose, et puis la mets
Dedans le trou ouvert si bien que je le bouche.
Après en l'œilladant d'un regard comme louche,
Poussant et repoussant sans jamais avoir paix.
Je laisse cheoir dedans je ne scay quoy d'epais,

Dont le tiede degout le rend morne et farouche.
Il se plaint sur la fin ; mais, pour l'encourager,
Et les tristes pensers de son cœur estranger,
Toujours je l'entretiens de toute ma puissance,
Tellement que jamais il n'est de moi laissé,
Que l'un, tout estonné, n'en ait pleine la pance,
Et l'oultre ne s'en aille et recrue et lassé.

L'enigme raconté par Ariane blessa un peu les oreilles des auditeurs lesquels le trouvèrent aucunement vergongueux. Au moyen de quoy Madame, la reprenant avec aigres paroles, luy monstra qu'elle n'en estoit contente. Mais la gentile demoiselle, qui estoit toute plaisante et gaillarde, d'un visage ouvert et joyaux s'excusa disant : 'Soubs vostre reverence, Madame, vous n'avez juste occasion vous fascher à l'encontre de moy d'autant que mon enigme qui porte seulement avec soy un ridicule effect n'est deshonneste comme on le pense, et voicy la raison : Quand on veut bailler un clystère à un malade, ne le faict on pas plus souvent coucher sur le ventre ? Après, ne prend on pas à

belles mains la chose, c'est a dire la seringue, et la met on pas dans le trou? Et pour ce que le malade prend le clystère contre son gré, se plaignant ordinairement, ne luy dict on pas qu'il ne se fasche, ains prenne courage? D'avantage celle qui luy donne, en poussant et repoussant, ne luy emplit elle pas la pance de la decoction? Ce faicte s'en retourne elle pas quasi toute lasse de la peine qu'elle a prise à l'entour du malade? Ainsi voyez vous, noble assistance, mon enigme n'estre tant sale et vicieux que le faisiez du commencement."

The Signora, as soon as she heard and understood this excellent interpretation of the laughable riddle, was appeased, and gave leave henceforth to the story-tellers to say whatsoever they would, without fear of being called to account. Cateruzza, whose turn it was to tell the third story, perceiving that the Signora's anger was moderated, and that free field had been given to her for

her discourse, began her story in an animated style as follows.

THE THIRD FABLE.

Polissena, a widow, has divers lovers. Panfilio, her son, reprobes her thereanent, whereupon she promises to mend her ways if he will lay aside certain uncouth habits. He agrees, but his mother dupes him, and finally they go on in their old courses.



WOMAN, when once she becomes thoroughly wedded to a certain practice, whether it be good or bad, finds it a hard matter to abstain therefrom, seeing that she is by nature disposed to continue to the end of her days in whatever habits she may have adopted. Wherefore I now purpose to tell you a story of an adventure which happened to a young widow, who, having lived a wanton's life a long time, could not by any means break away from it. Nay, even when her own son, moved by righteous desire, lovingly reproved her,

she played a wily trick upon him in her subtle treachery, and went on in her evil ways. All of this I will set forth fully in the course of my tale.

There once lived, gracious ladies (it was not long ago, and on that account you may peradventure know something thereof), in the splendid and renowned city of Venice, a pretty little widow, who was called by name Polissena, still young in years and exceeding beautiful in person, but of very low estate. This woman had brought forth by her husband, who was dead, a son named Panfilio, a youth of good parts, of virtuous life, and of praiseworthy manners, who was at this time a goldsmith by trade. And because (as I have already said) Polissena was young, very handsome, and graceful, many gallants — and amongst these were some of the chiefest nobles of the city — cast amorous eyes upon her and wooed her persistently. And she, who in former days had tasted freely of the pleasures of the world and

of the sweetness of love's commerce, was not slow in giving assent to the solicitations of her wooers, and delivered herself up, body and soul, to the embraces of all those who would have her. So hot and amorous was her temper that she did not confine herself to the endearments of one or two lovers (which, seeing that she was young and so early left a widow, would have been a pardonable fault), but granted the favour of her person to all comers, having no regard for her own honour or for the honour of her husband.

Panfilio, who was fully cognizant of his mother's way of life (not that he in any way favoured it, but because from time to time he could not escape witnessing her shameful carriage), was deeply grieved thereanent, and suffered the deepest anguish of heart and that mental suffering, so hard to be borne, which any man of upright mind would of necessity feel in such a pass. Wherefore the wretched youth, living from

day to day with his soul vexed by these torments, and not seldom feeling that the burden of his disgrace was more than he could endure, would oftentimes take council with himself whether it would not be better for him to slay his mother outright; but when he remembered that he had taken his being from her, he let go this cruel purpose and resolved to see whether he might not prevail upon her by words, and induce her to adopt a more cleanly manner of life. So one day he seized an opportune moment, and, having seated himself beside his mother, addressed her affectionately in the following terms: ‘My beloved and honoured mother, it is with the greatest grief and distress that I now venture to approach you, and I am sure you will not refuse to lend your ears and listen to what I have to say. It is something which I have, until now, kept close hidden in my own heart. Formerly I believed you to be wise, prudent, and circumspect; but

now, to my sorrow, I know too well that you are none of these things, and so grieved am I on this account that I would to God I were as far from you as I am near you.¹ You, as far as I can understand, are given over to the most scandalous life, one which alike stains your own honour and the good name of my late father, your husband. And if you will not have any regard for your own character, I beg you at least to show some consideration for me, seeing that I am your only son, and one in whom you may reckon to find a firm and faithful support of your old age.'

The mother, when she had listened to these words of her son, laughed in his face and went on with her shameful manner of life as before. Panfilio, perceiving that she was in nowise moved by his entreaties and kindly words, resolved to waste his breath no more, but to let her go on as she list. It chanced that not many days after this, Panfilio, by a

¹ Orig., *esser tanto da lungi, quanto io vi sono da presso.*

stroke of ill fortune, became infected with the itch, and in so malignant a form that he could scarce have fared worse had he been a leper. Besides, the weather was at this time very cold, and on this account he found it impossible to get cured of his distemper. In the evening poor Panfilio would sit anear the fire, and the heat thereof, inflaming his blood all the more, aggravated the itch tenfold and caused him to scratch himself without ceasing and to work himself into a frenzy. One evening, as he sat before the fire, as was his wont, scratching himself, there came to the house one of his mother's lovers, and tarried a long time with her in amorous conversation. The wretched youth, besides being annoyed by the irritating scabs which vexed him cruelly, was further tormented and pierced to the heart at the sight of his mother in dalliance with her paramour. When at last the latter had taken his leave, Panfilio (still scratching his scabs) said to his mother : ' Mother, some time

ago I exhorted you to restrain your lust and abandon this evil and dishonest manner of life, which covers you with foul shame and brings to me, who am your son, no small injury and ill-fame. But you, like the wanton woman you are, turned a deaf ear to what I had to say, and preferred to go on in the guilty indulgence of your carnal appetites rather than listen to my counsel. Ah, my dear mother! I entreat you to have done with this disgraceful way of living. Keep that honour, which it is your duty to preserve, and cast this shame from you, and do not seek to kill me with grief and ill-fame. Do you not see that you may, at any moment, be called to your account, inasmuch as death is always by our side? Do you not hear what evil things are said of you at every corner?'

While Panfilio was giving forth this exhortation, he continued to scratch himself all the time, and Polissena, when she heard his preachings and saw his scratch-

ings, planned a joke which she determined to play off on him, hoping thereby to put a stop to his complaints about her conduct, and it happened that this jest of hers came to exactly the issue she had forecast. Turning to her son with a mischievous smile she said: ‘Panfilio, you are always grieving and complaining to me concerning the evil life which — as you affirm — I lead. I own that my life is not a seemly one, and that your warnings and counsels thereanent mark you to be a good son; but I ask you now whether you will do one single thing to please me, to serve as a proof that you are indeed as jealous of my honour as you protest. If you will consent to this, I, for my part, promise to place myself in your hands, and to have done with all my lovers, and to lead a good and holy life; but if you fail to gratify me in this respect, be sure that I will pay no regard to your wishes, but will give myself over to a course yet more vicious than any I have hitherto

followed.' The son, who longed to see his mother return to an honest way of life more than for anything else in the world, made answer to her thus : ' Command me to do what you will, my mother ; for even were you to bid me throw myself into the fire and be there consumed to ashes, I would willingly carry out your wishes, if thereby I might be able to free you from the shame and infamy of the life you now lead.' ' Listen then well to what I am going to say to you,' said Polissena, ' and consider my words, for if you shall diligently carry out the injunctions I lay upon you, everything you wish shall be fully granted to you ; but if, on the other hand, you should fail in your promise, you will find yourself in a deeper state of ignominy than ever before.' ' I bind myself to observe and perform any duty or task you may put upon me,' said Panfilio. ' Then,' replied his mother, ' I will tell you what thing this is I require you to do. It is nothing more

arduous, my son, than that you should promise you will not scratch your scabs for three whole evenings. If you will observe this light request of mine, I will, on my part, satisfy your wishes.'

Panfilio, when he listened to the proposition made by his mother, sat for some time in thinking thereanent, and though, itching as he did, he knew full well that this condition of hers would prove no easy one to observe, he nevertheless accepted it with joy, and as a token of good faith shook hands with his mother upon the bargain. When the first of the evenings appointed for the trial had come, Panfilio, having left his workshop, went home, and throwing off his cloak began to walk up and down the room. After a little, finding himself somewhat cold, he sat down in a corner of the chimney close to the fire, and then the troublesome itch, provoked by the heat, began to molest him so sharply that he was sorely distressed and longed to scratch himself to get some

ease. The mother, who was a very cunning jade, had taken good care to have a hot fierce fire on the hearth, in order that Panfilio might be well heated, and now, when she saw him writhing and stretching himself out after the manner of a snake, she said to him, ‘Panfilio, what is it you do? Take good heed that you break not your promise, for if you keep your word I will assuredly keep mine.’ To this Panfilio made answer: ‘Have no doubt of my constancy, mother. See that you are firm yourself, for I will keep my pledge.’ And all the while they were thus talking they were both of them raging with desire, the one to scratch his itching hide, and the other to find herself once more with one or other of her lovers.

Thus the first evening passed, bringing great discomfort both to mother and son, and when the second came, Polisena again caused to be made a large fire, and having got ready a good supper awaited her son’s return. Panfilio, firm-

ly set on keeping his word, clenched his teeth and put up with his trouble as well as he could, and thus the second evening went by without any misadventure. Polissena, when she saw how steadfast in his determination Panfilio was, and considered how two evenings had already gone by without his having scratched himself at all, began to fear greatly that after all she would be the loser, and, mightily disturbed in spirit, began to lament her luckless case. For all this time she was strongly assailed by the pricks of amorous desire, and spent her time in devising some scheme whereby Panfilio might be driven once more to scratch his skin, and she herself in consequence of his failure to keep his promise, be free to wanton with her paramours. So for the next evening she made ready a delicate supper, with no lack of costly and heady wine, and awaited the coming of her son. When Panfilio returned and remarked the unwonted luxury of their evening meal, he was greatly as-

tonished thereat, and, turning to his mother, he said: ‘Mother, for what reason have you set out such a princely feast as this? Is it possible that you have indeed changed your mind?’ To this Polissena made answer: ‘Certainly not, my son; I am more firmly set in my purpose than ever, but by chance the thought struck me how you work hard every day at your trade, from early morn till nightfall, and besides this I could not fail to notice how sorely this accursed itch has worn and emaciated your body, scarcely leaving any life in you; so I felt deep compassion for your suffering, and was moved to set before you some more delicate dish than is our wont to eat, in order that you might gather strength therefrom, and assist nature to withstand more readily the torments which you have to endure from the itch.

Panfilio, who was young and simple, did not detect his mother’s cunning scheme, nor espy the snake that was

hidden amongst these fair flowers of her kindness, but at once set himself down to the table close to the fire, and began with his mother to eat with zest and to drink his wine with a merry heart. But the cunning and malicious Polissena would now go and poke up the logs and blow the fire in order to make it burn all the fiercer, and now ply the poor fellow with the delicate savoury dishes, which were highly seasoned with all manner of spices, so that his blood might be more and more inflamed by the food and the warmth of the fire, and he himself be forced, on this account, to scratch his itch. Therefore, at last, when Panfilio had sat for some time close to the fire and filled his belly to repletion, such a fury of itching came over him that he felt he must die if he could not scratch himself; but, by dint of twisting his body and fidgetting now to this side and now to that, he endured the torment as best he could.

But after a while the heat of the food,

which had been carefully salted and seasoned with this intent, and the Greek wine, and the scorching fire, inflamed his blood so direly that the wretched Panfilio found his torment greater than he could bear ; so, tearing open his shirt and laying bare his chest, and untrussing his hose, and turning up his sleeves over his elbows, he set to scratching himself with such a will that the blood began to run down from all parts of him as if it had been sweat, and, turning to his mother, who was laughing heartily to herself, he cried in a loud voice : ‘ Let each one enjoy his own fancy ! Let each one enjoy his own fancy ! ’ The mother, although she saw clearly that the game was now hers, feigned to be grieved amain, and said to Panfilio, ‘ My son, what folly is this of yours ? What is it that you would do ? Is this the way you keep the promise you have made me ? Of a truth you will never again be able to throw it in my teeth that I have not kept faith with you.’ Panfilio

listened, scratching himself with all his might the while, and answered his mother with a troubled mind: 'Mother, let us for the future follow the bent which best pleases us. You must go about your business, and I will go about mine.' And from this hour the son never dared to question his mother as to her course of life, and she went back to her old habits, entertaining her lovers in freer measure even than before.

All the listeners were mightily pleased with this fable told by Cateruzza, and after they had spent some time in merry discourse thereanent, the Signor called upon the damsel to propound her enigma, and she, not wishing to interrupt the accustomed order of the entertainment, smilingly gave it in these words:

What thing is that we ladies prize:
Five fingers' breadth will tell its size;
Divers fair nooks you find inside;
No outlet, though the gate is wide;
The first attempt will give us pain,
For free access is hard to gain;

But later will grow long and straight,
And large and small accommodate?

Cateruzza's obscurely worded enigma gave abundant matter to the ladies and gentlemen to consider ; but, carefully as they debated it from every point, and turned it over and over again in their minds, they were not able to hit upon its real interpretation. Wherefore the prudent Cateruzza, seeing that they were all still wandering in obscurity and unable to grasp the meaning of her riddle, said promptly, "So as not to keep this honourable company any longer in suspense, I will give forthwith the interpretation of my enigma, subjecting myself, however, in this to the judgment of others, who may be much wiser than myself. My enigma, dear ladies, signifies nothing else than the glove which you wear to protect your hand ; this, you know, will sometimes cause you slight hurt when you first put it on, but soon accommodates itself to your pleasure."

This explanation was held to be quite satisfactory by the honourable company, and when Cateruzza had ceased speaking the Signora gave a sign to Lauretta, who sat at Vicenza's side, to take her turn at the story-telling. And she, with a pretty boldness of mien and speech, turned her bright face towards Bembo, and said: "Signor Antonio, it were a great shame if you, kindly and gallant gentleman as you are, did not tell the company some fable with your wonted grace and talent. I, for my part, would willingly relate one, but just now I cannot call to mind one which would be at the same time pleasing and droll. Therefore, I beg you, Signor Antonio, that you will bear the burden in my place, and if you grant me this favour, I shall ever consider I am greatly beholden to you." Bembo, who had in no way prepared himself for story-telling this evening, answered: "Signora Lauretta, although I feel myself very unfit for the task, yet—seeing

that a request from you is as potent with me as a command — I will accept the charge you lay upon me, and will strive to satisfy your wishes, at least in part.” And the Signora having given her gracious permission, he began his story in these words.

THE FOURTH FABLE.

A dispute having arisen between three sisters of a convent as to which of them should fill the post of abbess, the bishop’s vicar decides that the office shall fall to the one who shall give the most eminent proof of her worthiness.



HOWEVER great may be the charm which modesty lends to people in general, I, nevertheless, rate it far higher, dear ladies, when one meets it in a man who knows his own self. Wherefore, with the good leave of the gracious ladies around me, I purpose to tell a story no less cleverly put together than pleasant, which, though it may prove somewhat

overcharged with ridicule and wanting in decency, I will do my best to relate to you in modest and seemly terms, such as are due and proper. And if perchance at any time my narrative should affront your chaste ears, I would now forestall your pardon for the offence, entreating you to hold back your censure till some future season.

In the noble city of Florence there is a certain convent with an illustrious reputation for holiness of life and for religion; the name of it I will not give just now, for fear of marring its fair fame by any spot of scandal. It happened that the abbess of this house, who was afflicted by many and heavy infirmities, came to the end of her days and rendered up her soul to her Creator. Wherefore, she being dead and her body buried with all the solemn rites of the Church, the surviving sisters caused a meeting of the chapter to be summoned by the ringing of the bell, so that all those who had a voice therein might

be called together. The vicar of monsignor the bishop, a prudent man and a learned, and one moreover who desired that the election of the new abbess should be carried out according to the strict letter of the law, gave the word to the assembled sisters to be seated and spake thus to them : ‘ Most respected ladies, you know well enough, I conclude, that the sole reason why you are gathered together here to-day is in order that you may make choice of some one who shall be the head over you. If this be so, at the bidding of the conscience which is in each of you it behoves you to elect the one who appears to you all the best fitted for the office.’ And all the sisters made answer that this was the course they were minded to follow.

Now it happened that in the convent there were three nuns betwixt whom there sprang up a very keen contention as to which of the three should be the new abbess, because each one had a certain following amongst the sisters, and

had the reputation of being held in honour by other superiors, wherefore all three of these greatly desired the title of abbess. While the sisters were getting ready for the election of their new head, one of the three nuns just mentioned, named Sister Veneranda, rose from her seat, and turning towards the other sisters, addressed them : ‘ My sisters, and my children, whom I hold in such high affection, you can understand well enough with what loving zeal I have ever given my best energies for the service of the convent, so that I have not only grown old therein, but am become veritably decrepit. Therefore, on account of my long service and of my advanced age, it seems to me only just and proper that I should be elected as your head, and if my long-continued labours and the vigils and prayers of my youth fail to persuade you to choose me, at least let my infirm old age appeal to your consideration ; for to this, above every other thing, your reverence is due. It must be apparent

to you that I can reckon on only a very short span of further life. Wherefore you may be sure that I shall, before long, make way for some other of you. For this reason, my well-beloved daughters, I beg that you will give me this brief season of ease and pleasure, and keep well in your hearts all the good counsels which I have ever given you.' And Veneranda, having finished her speech, weeping the while, was silent.

The appeal of the first sister being finished, Sister Modestia, a woman of middle age, rose from her seat and spake in this wise: 'Mothers and sisters mine, you have heard without concealment, and you must have clearly understood the claims put forward by Sister Veneranda, who happens to be the most advanced in age of any of us; but this fact, in my estimation, gives her no special claim to be chosen as our abbess, inasmuch as she is now come to such a time of life that, through senility, she has too much of simplicity and too little of counsel, and

before long will herself require to be controlled and cared for, in lieu of controlling us. But if you, in your mature judgment, give due consideration to my good estate, and to the trust that is due to me, and remember of what ancestry I come, you cannot, of a surety, for the debt each of you owes to conscience, choose any other one but me to be your abbess. Our convent—as every one of you must know—is greatly vexed with processes and suits at law and has much need of support and protection, and what greater defence could you furnish to the monastery against its adversaries than the countenance and patronage of my family, who would give—supposing that I am elected your head—not merely their wealth and goods in your defence, but even their lives.’

Scarcely had Sister Modestia resumed her seat when Sister Pacifica rose to her feet, and, with the guise of deep humility, spake as follows : ‘ I am well assured, most honoured sisters, nay, I may take

it for certain that you, prudent and well-advised ladies as you all are, will feel no little astonishment that I, who came as it were yesterday to abide amongst you, should desire to put myself on an equality with, or even to supersede the two most honoured sisters who have already spoken. These ladies, both on the score of age and of experience, are far above me ; but if, with the eyes of the understanding, you come to consider carefully how many and how great are my qualifications, of a surety you will rate more highly my fresh youth than the decrepit age of the one and the family claims of the other. I — as all of you must know quite well — brought with me hither a very rich dowry, by the aid of which your convent, which had fallen wellnigh to ruin through the lapse of time, has been reconstructed from roof to foundation. I say nought about the houses and the farms which have been bought with the money of my dowry, from which every year the house gains a great sum in the

shape of rent. Wherefore, on account of these and of other qualifications of mine, and as a recompense for the many and great benefits you have received from me, it is your duty to choose me as your abbess, seeing that your food and your raiment depend (under God) upon my bounty,' and having thus spoken she sat down.

When the three sisters had thus brought their discourses to a conclusion, the vicar of the lord bishop summoned all the nuns into his presence one after another, and bade them write down the name of the sister whom, upon their conscience, they wished to be raised to the dignity of abbess. When this had been done, and when all the sisters had recorded their votes, it was found that all the three were equal as to the number of votes given for each, nor was there any difference between them. On this account there arose amongst all the sisters a very acrimonious dispute, and some wished to have the first named,

and some the second, and some the third, for their head ; nor could there be found any way of pacifying the contention. Whereupon the bishop's vicar, perceiving how dogged was the obstinacy of each faction, and bearing in mind that each one of the three sisters might well be promoted to the honourable office of abbess for the special qualifications duly cited, cast about in his mind to devise a way and means whereby one of the three might retain the post of abbess without giving any cause of offence or disaffection to the others. He ordered the three sisters who sought the office to be summoned into his presence, and thus addressed them : ' Well-beloved sisters, I comprehend fully your many virtues and your many qualifications, and I cannot but say that either one of you would be in the highest sense worthy to be chosen as abbess of this convent. But between you three honourable sisters the contest for election has been amazingly severe, and the votes given

for each of you have proved to be equal in number. On this account—in order that you may continue your peaceful lives in love and quietness—I hereby propose to you to employ in the election of your abbess a method which—as I hope—shall lead to the contention being brought to an end to the satisfaction of you all. The method which I suggest is this: each one of you three sisters, who have put forth your claims to succeed to the office of abbess, shall exercise herself for the next three days to perform in our presence some special feat which shall be praiseworthy in itself and worthy of being held in remembrance, and whichever of these three sisters shall show herself able to perform the feat the most capable and most worthy of future fame shall be, by the good consent of all the sisters, duly chosen abbess, and to her shall be accorded all the honour and reverence which of right belong to her.’

This proposition of the bishop’s vicar

won the approbation of the three sisters, on which account they all with one voice promised to observe the conditions laid down. And when the day appointed for the trial had come, and all the nuns belonging to the convent were gathered together in the chapter house, the vicar caused to be brought before him the three sisters who aspired to mount up to the high post of abbess, and questioned them severally as to whether they had given due thought to their affairs in the matter of performing some noteworthy feat as he had ordained, and they all gave answer that they had. Après¹ estans toutes assises Sœur Venerande, qui estoit la plus aagée de toutes, se mit au milieu de la place, et tirant de sa cucule une petite eguille de damas, laquelle y estoit attachée, leva ses robbes et sa chemise par devant, puis haulsant une cuisse en la presence de tous les assistants, pissa si delicattement au travers du trou de l'eguille, qu'une seule petite

¹ Translation by Pierre de la Rivey.

goutte ne tomba a terre que premier elle n'eust passe par le trou. Quoy voyant, le grand vicaire et les religieuses, pensèrent indubitablement que Venerande deust estre abbesse, jugeans estre impossible pouvoir faire chose plus subtile que ceste là. Ce faict, Sœur Modestie, que n'estoit de beaucoup si vielle que l'autre, se leva, et s'estant mise en place marchande, tira de son sein un dé dont on joue, et le mit sur un banc, les cinq points dessus. Après print cinq petits grains de millet et mit chacun d'iceux en l'un des cinq points du dé ; puis descouvrant son derriere et approchant ses fesses du banc sur lequel estoit le dé, fit un pet si gros et terrible, qu'il fit quasi évanouir de peur le grand vicaire et toutes les religieuses, et encore que ce pet sortist avec un bruict violent et sifflement horrible, si fut il neantmoins tiré d'une belle adresse et dextérité, que le grain qui estoit au trou du milieu demeura en sa place, et les autres disparurent et ne furent jamais veus depuis. Toute l'as-



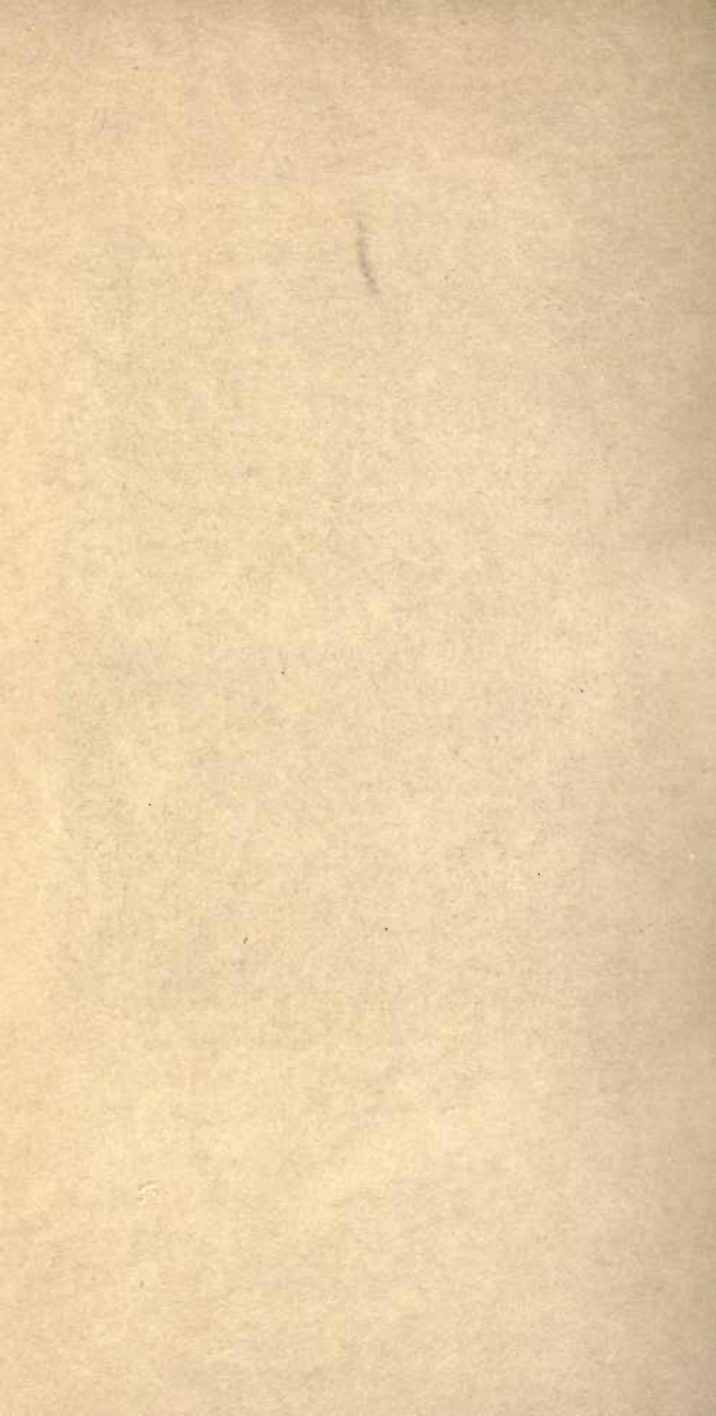
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**Sister Pacifique Proves Her
Worthiness**

Night the Sixth

FOURTH FABLE





semblée ne trouva ceste espreuve moindre que l'autre ; cependant demeuroid coye, attendant se que feroit Sœur Pacifique ; laquelle, se mettant en jeu comme les autres, fit un tour, non d'une vieille, mais d'une jeune hommasse, pour ce qu'ayant tiré de sa pochette un noyau de pesche le jecta en l'air, puis soudain se retroussa par derriere, levant le cul en haut, et recevant le noyau avec les fesses, l'estreignit si fort qu'elle le grugea plus menu que n'est menue la poussière. The vicar, who was a man sage and well-advised, began forthwith to confer with the sisterhood and to give mature consideration to the amazing feats performed by the three competing sisters, and when, after a time, he perceived that there was little prospect of coming to a decision, he took time to deliberate as to what the final judgment should be. And, forasmuch as he was not able to find in his learned books aught which might guide him in deciding this matter, he let it go as a thing not to be solved,

and even to this our day the dispute is still pending. Wherefore I call upon you, most learned and prudent ladies, to disentangle this question, which, on account of its importance, I should not venture myself to approach.

This story of Bembo's proved to be more a source of mirth to the men than to the ladies, seeing that the latter for very shame hid their faces in their laps and did not dare to look up. But the men discussed now one incident and now another of the story they had just listened to, and gathered no little diversion therefrom, till at last the Signora, noticing that their laughter was somewhat unbecoming, and that the ladies sat as though they had been changed into so many marble statues, commanded silence and put an end to the unseemly laughter, in order that Bembo might follow the accustomed rule by giving his enigma. But he, who had already spoken as much as was meet, turned towards the fair Lauretta and

said: "It is now your turn, Signora Lauretta, to set an enigma. I may indeed have satisfied you in one matter, but that is no reason why I should satisfy you in another." And the lady, who had no wish to make delay by her refusal, thus began in order to relieve herself of her obligation:

A riddle I would have you guess ;
And though its meaning savours less
Of ruse than of a ribald jest,
I'll beg you take it at its best.
First I to my companion go,
He up above, and I below ;
Then something hard I take in hand,
And temper it with unguent bland,
And place it where it ought to go ;
Then work it featly to and fro,
And swing and sway it up and down,
Until success my efforts crown.

Everyone declared that the enigma proposed by Lauretta was fully as interesting as the story of Bembo, and, because it seemed as if few or any of the company could fathom its meaning

the Signora directed her to give the interpretation thereof. Then Lauretta, so as not to interpose any further delay, spake thus: "My riddle means that there were two men who set to work to saw in pieces a huge beam of wood. One of these took in his hand the saw, which is a very hard thing, and went up above, while the other remained in the saw-pit beneath. The first then smeared the saw with oil, and placed it in the fissure of the beam, and then the two companions working together handled the saw up and down in order to accomplish their task."

The ingenious interpretation of this enigma gave the greatest pleasure to all the company, and, after the talk had ceased, the Signora gave command to Eritrea to begin the telling of her fable, and she straightway spake as follows.

THE FIFTH FABLE.

Pre Zefiro works a spell on a youth whom he
finds eating figs in his garden.



It has often been said, dearest ladies, that there are mysterious virtues abiding in words, and in herbs, and in stones; but stones assuredly may be held to excel both herbs and words in persuasive powers, as you will clearly see by this little tale of mine.

There once lived in the city of Bergamo a miserly priest, called Pre Zefiro, who by common report was said to be possessed of great wealth. This man had a garden situated beyond the city walls, near the gate which is called Penta. This same garden was surrounded in such a manner by walls and ditches that neither man nor beast could enter therein, and it was well planted with fruit-trees of every kind, and amongst others

there was a great fig-tree with branches spreading on all sides, and laden every season with beautiful and excellent fruit, of which the priest was wont to partake every year with all the gentlemen and notables of the city. These figs were of a mixed colour, between white and purple, and they dropped tears of juice which were like honey. So precious were they, that they were always carefully guarded by watchmen. One night, when by chance the guardians were not on the watch, a youth clambered up into this fig-tree, and, having chosen the ripest figs, silently set to work to stow them away in their skins, just as they were, in the storehouse of his belly.

Pre Zefiro, having suddenly remembered that there were no watchmen in his garden, flew thither, and straightway saw the fellow sitting in the tree and eating figs at his leisure. Whereupon the priest began to beg him to come down, but as he took no heed of his words, Pre Zefiro threw himself on his

knees and conjured him by heaven, by the earth, by the planets, by the stars, by the elements, and by all the sacred words which are written in the Scriptures, to come down from the tree; but still the youth ate steadily on. Pre Zefiro, seeing that he gained no advantage whatever by these adjurations, gathered certain herbs which grew round about in the garden, and once more conjured the fellow by the virtue which dwelt therein to come down, but he only clambered up higher so that he might fill himself with greater ease. Then the priest spake as follows: ‘It is written that in words, and in herbs, and in stones, there are hidden virtues. I have conjured you by the first two, and they have availed nothing to bring you down out of the tree, now by virtue of the third I once more conjure you to come down to the ground.’ So straightway he began to hurl stones at the thief with great rancour and fury, smiting him now on the arm, now on the leg, now on the spine;

so that at last the youth, swollen and bethumped and bruised as he was on account of the frequent blows he had received, was obliged to come down from his perch. Then he took to flight, having first given back to Pre Zefiro all the figs which he had stowed away in his bosom. And thus stones proved themselves to be more potent as instruments of exorcism than either words or herbs.

Eritrea had no sooner come to the end of her brief story than the Signora bade her to follow it up with her enigma, so without further delay she spake as follows :

Gallant knights and ladies gay,
Tell me truthfully, I pray ;
Answer quick to my behest,
Which of three you like the best ?
That which is bound close and tight,
Or that makes you writhe by night,
Or that which in the evening grey
Will drive you from your bed away.
If my speech you fathom well,
Tell me, gentles, quickly tell.

All the listeners were mightily perplexed over this cunningly-devised enigma propounded by Eritrea, and no one knew what answer to give. But the Signora pressed each one to give an opinion, and one gave preference to the narrow and well tied, another to the turn which comes early, and another that of the first watches of the night. Nevertheless not one of them understood the true signification of the riddle. Wherefore Eritrea, when she saw their want of agreement, said: 'It does not seem right that my gracious hearers should remain any longer in doubt, so I will say at once that the thing which is bound close and tight is the scurf on the skin, which, if one wants to be cured of it, must be doctored and tied up tightly with bandages. The thing which causes a man to leave his bed in the night is the flux, since one suffering therewith must needs find relief. The last named, which touches one in the evening hour, is the troublesome itch, which, when night is coming on,

heats the blood, and causes such intolerable irritation that one with it upon him is fain to tear his flesh with his teeth, as did the widow's son in the learned and elegant story we have lately heard from Cateruzza.'

The ingenious explanation set forth by Eritrea to her very knotty riddle gave universal satisfaction, and when the listeners had all taken leave of the Signora, the hour being now late, they went their several ways, under promise to return the next evening to their wonted place of meeting.

The End of the Sixth Night.



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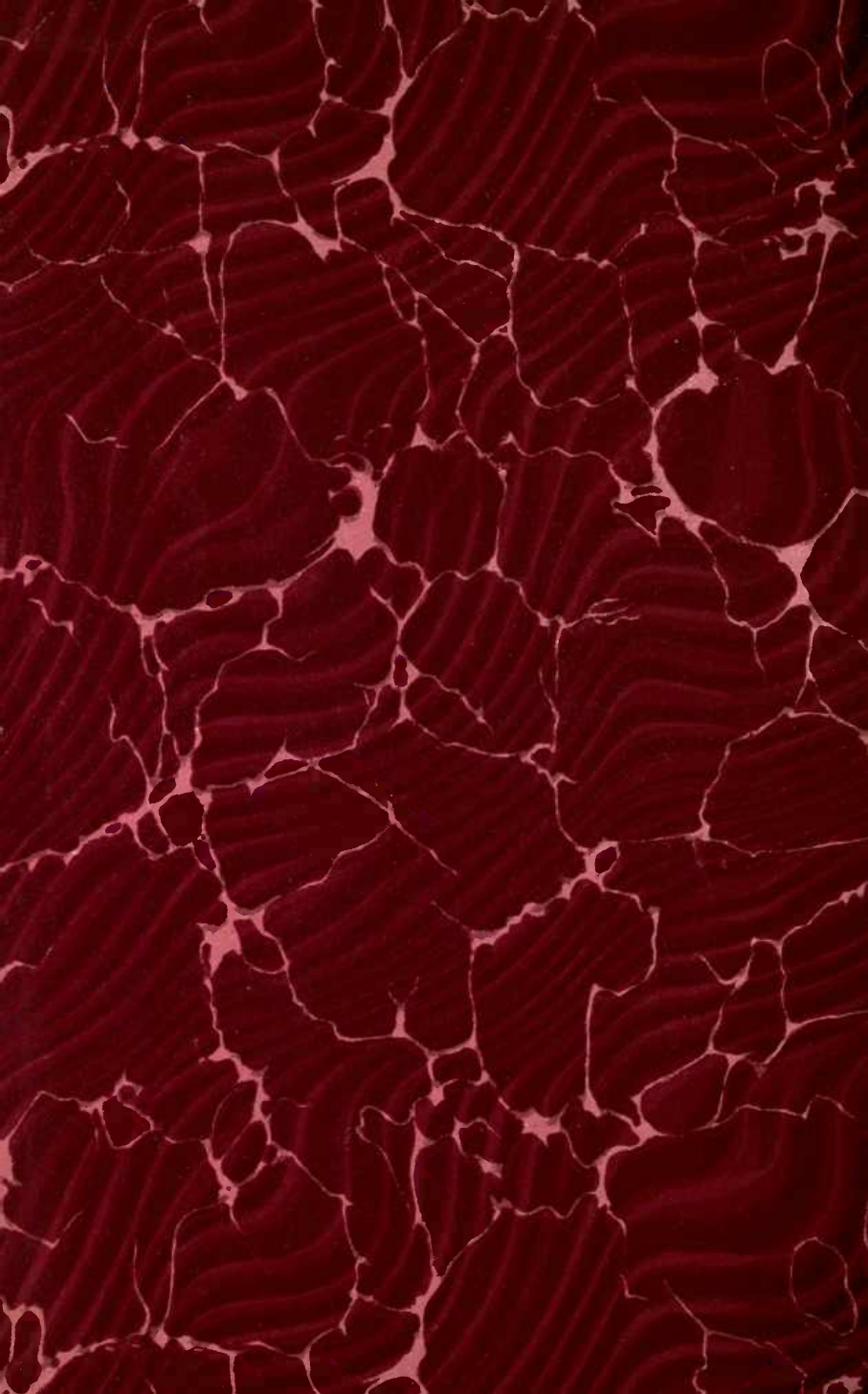
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